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ABSTRACT

This book is the outcome of a regional study on using literacy as a tool for empowering the poor, carried out by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) with collaborative support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The book sketches a program for empowerment of the poor through basic education on the basis of synthesis of the rich field-level basic education experiences that have been acquired. Chapter 1 provides background information on the role of literacy in empowerment of the poor and about the causes and characteristics of poverty. The second chapter gives an overview of poverty in the Asia-Pacific region and the potential contribution of basic education to eradicate poverty and empower the poor. Chapter 3 discussed principles and strategies of basic education and suggests reorienting goals and objectives, program content, teaching-learning methods and materials, evaluation of learning outcomes, and training of teachers. The last chapter outlines action implications of the various general and program-specific proposals emerging from the discussion, specific actions that can be launched under key action areas, and modalities for intercountry collaborative support. (Contains 31 references.) (KC)

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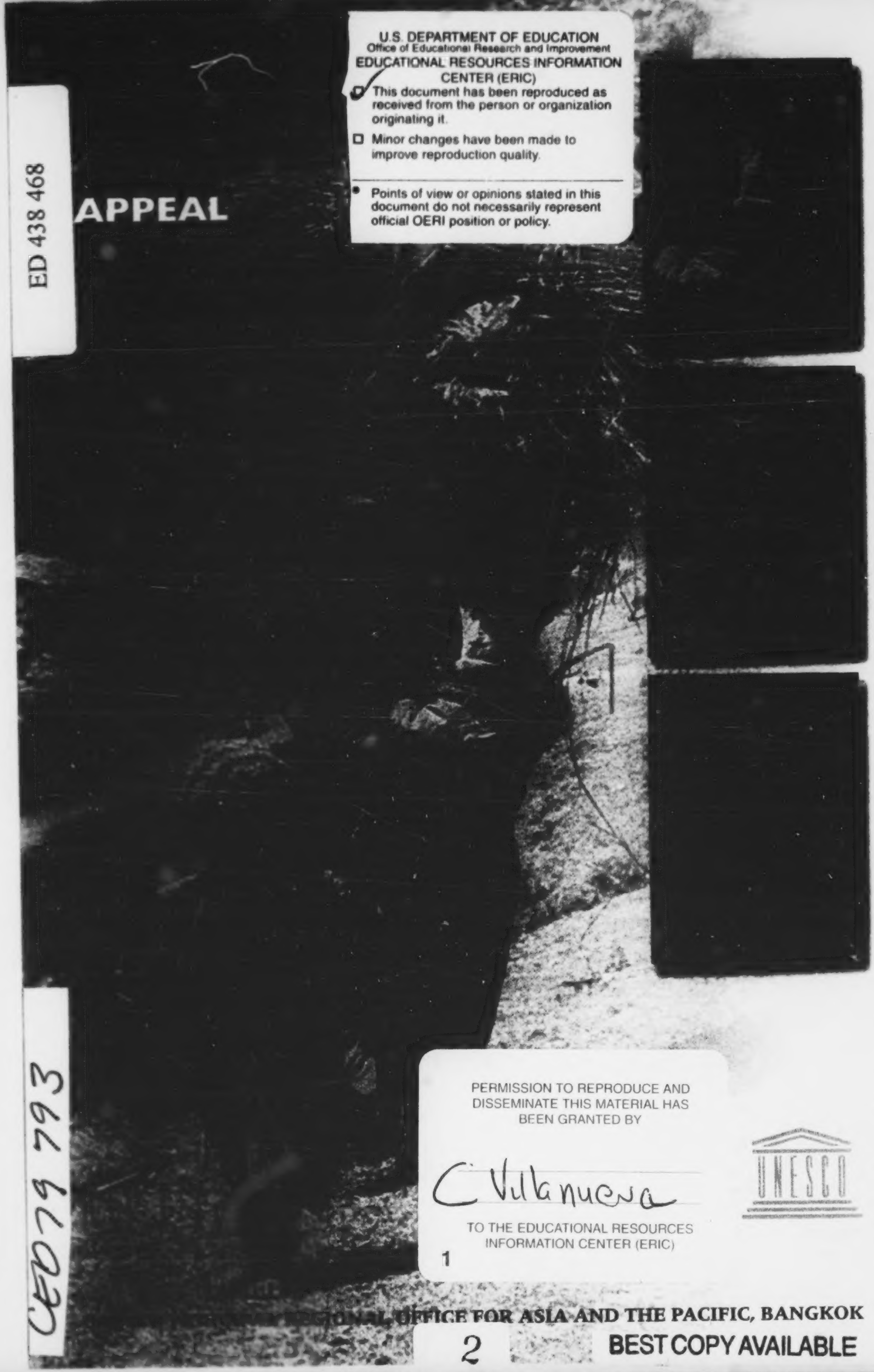

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The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) is an inter-country cooperative programme designed to promote basic education for all in the region. It promotes literacy, primary and continuing education for all as interdependent components of basic education and a precondition for sustainable human development and poverty eradication.

The three priority action areas of APPEAL are:

- reaching the un-reached, under-served and the disadvantaged population groups in rural and urban areas with particular emphasis on girls and women;
- promoting community participation and ownership of basic education programmes at the grassroots; and
- improving relevance and quality of basic education and enhancing learning achievement of children, youth and adults.

BASIC EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF THE POOR

Report of a Regional Study on

Literacy as a Tool for Empowerment of the Poor

Coordinated by

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PREFACE

Basic Education for Empowerment of the Poor is the outcome of a regional study on Literacy as a Tool for the Empowerment of the Poor which the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) carried out with collaborative support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The book seeks to sketch a perspective for empowerment of the poor through basic education programmes on the basis of synthesis of the rich field level basic education experiences acquired thus far and building on the accumulated wisdom. Apart from reiteration of time-tested lessons learnt from previously tried out experiments the book also presents new insights and ideas deriving from fresh field studies and consultations with a wide range of basic education planners, administrators, scholars and practitioners from the countries of the region.

The point of departure for this study is in its bold and explicit declaration of poverty eradication as a priority concern of basic education programmes. Poverty, in the past, has been treated as too economics-specific a problem for educational action except in an indirect way and subsumed under the more general category of 'educational disadvantage'. The belief dies hard that education cannot have anything directly to do with a hard core, economic problem like poverty and that it can, at best, only play a secondary or marginal role. While taking cognisance of and fully appreciating the limitations and constraints under which the educational subsystem has to labour, the study has nevertheless argued for the conscious pursuit of empowerment of the poor as an overt objective of all basic education programmes, thereby unlocking the meaning of basic learning needs as expounded by the historic World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in

1990. The study has sought to demonstrate that this is no emotive rhetoric but a practical educational objective that can be translated into concrete curricular programmes and activities. It has sought to show that the adoption of empowerment as an objective of basic education calls for taking a fresh look at the entire gamut of the educational process – goals, contents, methods, materials, teacher training and planning and management. There are distinctly poverty related learning needs to be satisfied through properly conceived, specially designed educational interventions. Poverty issues especially as they impinge on education should be openly discussed, squarely faced and educationally acted upon without shying away from them because they transcend the realm of the "purely educational". The book has argued for taking a broader view of basic education on the lines elaborated by the WCEFA and based on this view has suggested a range of general strategies and illustrative programme specific actions to deal with the variety and complexity of learning needs and problems deriving from poverty. These would, it is hoped, inspire individual countries – at the country level and through inter-country cooperative arrangements – to explore the full potential and possibilities of their basic education programmes and initiate actions towards designing and implementing educational interventions aimed at empowerment of the poor as appropriate to their respective contexts. It is also hoped that the genius of the countries coupled with their concern and commitment to eradicate poverty will surely see to it that their basic education systems will come out with their own creative and innovative strategies to address the task cut out for them.

The study in the present form is the synthesis of the outcomes of a series of activities undertaken in connection with the regional study carried out in several countries by leading national and local institutions engaged in the promotion of basic education for all. We acknowledge with great appreciation their most valuable contributions and invite all of them to recognize this as the product of their own work.

The preparation of this book would not have been possible without the support and valuable contributions of a large number of individuals and organizations. In the early stage of the preparation of this study we received valuable inputs and suggestions on the conceptual framework and design of the study from several field offices of UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and many individual specialists. We owe all of them special appreciation and gratitude for their interest and contributions.

There are many who participated in carrying out the country studies and eventually contributed in the preparation of various country reports and our thanks are due to all of them. Prof. Chitra Naik, Member of the National Planning Commission, India guided the study carried out by the Indian Institute of Education, Pune and provided valuable inputs. Mr Kazi Rafiqul Alam, Executive Director of the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh, Mr S.S. Salgaonkar, Director of the Indian Institute of Education, Pune, Prof. Bajra Raj Shakya, Executive Director of the Research Centre for Educational Innovation for Development (CERID), and Mr Chuman Singh Basnyat, Joint Secretary, Planning, Ministry of Education, Nepal, participated in the Sub-regional Technical Consultation organized in Kathmandu, Nepal, for the South Asian countries. Mr Zhang Tiedao, Director of the Gansu Institute for Educational Research of China, Mr Ouane Phensimuonng, Head of the Department of Non Formal Education, Laos, Mr Mohd Hoesne Hussain, Director, Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA) Malaysia, Dr Rosario J. De Guzman, Director, Bureau of Non formal Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports, Philippines and Dr Suvit Pichayasathit, Instructor, Northern Regional Non formal Education Centre participated in the Sub-regional Technical Consultation for South-east Asia and China held in Lampang, Thailand. Mr F. L Higginson, consultant for the UNESCO Office in Apia, W Samoa, prepared a Pacific perspective on the subject. We deeply appreciate and express our gratitude to all of them for their valuable inputs and contributions to this study.

Prof. C. Seshadri of Mysore, India has been closely associated as principal consultant from the very inception of this study. We acknowledge the valuable and extensive substantive contributions Prof. Seshadri made in the preparation of the conceptual framework and programme perspective. Mr D.A. Perera, Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka, served as consultant and participated in the Sub-regional/Regional Technical Consultations held in Kathmandu and Hua Hin, Thailand, and contributed in the preparation of documents on poverty and basic education scenario in the countries of the region. Mr Ehsanur Rahman, Director of Planning, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, served as consultant and assisted in the compilation and preparation of data and information on poverty and basic education in the region and participated in the sub-regional consultations held on the subject. Prof. Washington Napitupulu, Chairman of the Indonesian National Commission for UNESCO, and Ms Veronica Arbon, Senior Lecturer, at the Batchelors College, Northern Territory, Darwin, Australia, participated in the Regional Technical Consultation held in Hua Hin, Thailand. We owe all of them our sincere gratitude and appreciation for their valuable contributions.

Colleagues from the secretariat of the Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) and UNESCO have contributed in many ways in the shaping of this study. Our warm appreciation to all of them and to Ms Wallapa Aramwitha for her careful and unfailing secretarial assistance.

APPEAL will soon be publishing three other documents on this subject which are the reports of the Technical Consultations held in Kathmandu, Nepal and Lampang, Thailand and the consultant report prepared with reference to selected Pacific countries by the UNESCO Office in Apia, Samoa. These documents contain specific references to programmes and activities of the countries covered in this study.

This study has been prepared under UNDP and UNESCO collaborative Support Services for Policy and Programme Development (SPPD) for regional inter-country cooperative programmes in literacy and basic education. We deeply acknowledge UNDP's interest and support.

The authors assume full responsibility for the opinions and judgements expressed in this report.

Victor M. Ordonez
Prem K. Kasaju
UNESCO, Bangkok
November, 1997

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Despite the noteworthy economic progress achieved in terms of rising income and consumption levels and social indicators of well being – life expectancy, child mortality and basic education- more than 1 billion (1,115 million) people in the developing world continue to live in absolute poverty. Three quarters of them live in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Nearly half of them live in South Asia alone.

Concerned with the growing incidence of poverty alongside developmental achievements of a positive kind, the global community observed 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. Earlier, a World Summit for Social Development had been convened to discuss the alleviation and reduction of poverty, expansion of productive employment and enhancement of social integration. These developments have been followed up with the proclamation of 1997-2006 as the United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty with its theme "Eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political, and economic imperative of human kind". Eradication of poverty through decisive national actions and international cooperation has been accepted as the objective of the Decade. At the regional level, poverty alleviation continues to rank high in the development agenda of the Asia-Pacific countries. The 9th Periodic Plan of Nepal has poverty alleviation as its overarching goal. A landmark consensus has been achieved in adopting the core goal of poverty eradication as part of the larger agenda on social development in the ESCAP region.

Policies and strategies for attacking poverty, however have kept changing all the time. At one time economic growth was considered the primary means of removing poverty and improving quality of life through its trickle down effect. The focus of development policies, consequently, was on attaining higher economic growth rates and increasing the GDP. When it was realized that economic growth did not automatically lead to removal or even alleviation of poverty and even generated social unrest in some cases the emphasis shifted to launching of sector, sub sector, area specific projects and programmes targeted for identified poor and aimed at providing them direct benefits. A wide range of strategies covering macro economic policies, asset redistribution policies and social policies and programmes is being tried out to deal with poverty in various mixes and with varying degrees of success. These include: delivery of basic social services-primary health care, family planning, low cost safe water and sanitation, nutrition, education-social safety nets and social funds of various kinds, targeted programmes, transfer of resources, skill upgradation, access to credit, income and employment generation and labour intensive public works.

Eradication of or at least reduction in poverty is what people expect from economic development. But it is increasingly being realised that economic growth while continuing to be the 'engine of development' does not, on its own, lead to elimination or reduction of poverty. In the last fifty years, developing countries have experienced an economic growth three times faster than the industrial ones and despite the increase in the world population form 2.5 to 5.5 billion per capita income has tripled and the world GDP has increased sevenfold. But, although social indicators on infant mortality, life expectancy, nutrition and education show remarkable improvements, the proportion of people living in conditions of abject poverty is still scandalously high at about one third of global population.[1] While the proportion of the poor world wide has declined from 32% in 1985 to 25% in 1995 the number of poor in absolute terms has increased and will continue rising with the gap widening between the rich and poor.[2] In Thailand national poverty ratio declined from 24% of population in 1988-89 to 13% in 1995 but the remaining 8 million people living in poverty are falling further behind. Disparities in income between the rich and poor continue to widen with the top 20% of highest earning households averaging an income some fourteen times more than the bottom 20%.[3] In Malaysia, although the incidence of poverty has declined overall, the number of poor households has increased from 3.1 m to 3.6 m in 1990 and is expected to increase to 4.4 m in 1995.[4] In India, although development has manifested itself in macro-economic terms, poverty is rampant in nearly half the country's population. It is clear that poverty will remain a major development imperative in the region well into the twenty-first century. The absence of an equitable and better shared economic growth has aggravated inequalities internationally between countries and domestically between social groups. The situation has its origin in massive emigration from rural areas to cities and extreme poverty in peri-urban settlements. The International Seminar on the Role of Science and Technology for Social Development observed that the failure of fifty years of development in eradicating the social ills of poverty, inequity and social exclusion has sobered "economic arrogance" and has even challenged the claims of technology to be the panacea. Even the economists have bidden good bye to the trickle down theory.

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[1] *UNESCO and the World Summit for Social Development, 1996*, p. 66.

[2] Tan, Poo Chang. Prospects for Poverty Alleviation in Asia and the Pacific into the Twenty First Century, ESCAP, mimeo.

There is no need to belabour the point further. Suffice it to say that it takes a great deal more to poverty eradication than introducing economic reforms or launching of poverty alleviation schemes. Enmeshed in a web of social, cultural, political and economic factors, the multi-faceted and deep rooted nature of poverty and the heterogeneous groups of poor persons necessitates focused and coordinated intervention on various fronts simultaneously. Of particular significance is the role of education in attacking poverty and enhancing life quality. However, the question of intervening to enhance living standards through education forms part of the larger issue of the relationship between education and development and therefore needs to be considered in that larger perspective.

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[3] Draft Action Strategy proposed by Thai-UNCAP, 1997, Bangkok, mimeo.

[4] Malaysia Country Study, mimeo.

Education and development

The achievements of development thus far, as already pointed out, constitute at best a 'mixed bag' and there is increasing disillusionment about its track record on the poverty front. Though 'development' continues to be the cherished goal of all societies, both the concept of development and the prevailing development models and policies have come under serious questioning during recent times. Attention has been drawn to structural adjustment policies that have severely affected social sectors such as education and health. For example, globalization of the economy is feared to adversely affect the material conditions of women workers and lead to further marginalization of women. After a critical review of development experience an international symposium observed that the new paradigm of development would consider development not as a stage but as a policy, not as a *received* but as a *lived* experience, not as economic growth *per se* but focusing on people, as a process of "reverse colonization" that would empower people and promote authentic and sustainable change.[5]

Development, in any case, is not just a matter of altering economic growth rates and paths. It has to be viewed in much broader terms and encompass the fulfilment of each person's human potential in its material, spiritual, individual and social dimensions. As the *Human Development Report* put it "Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. Three essential areas are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living."

This paradigm shift from development as such to *human* development underscores the primary importance of education which essentially is a process of working on human beings in order to bring about desirable changes in the way they think, feel and act. As a transforming experience that contributes to enlargement of one's self and full realization of one's potentialities education is an intrinsic good to be cherished for its own sake and a basic human right. From this point of view, as an ethical imperative, education occupies the centre stage of development. From a more practical angle, education is considered as a social instrument for developing human resources and forming human capital and increasing national productivity. Evidences are adduced on the contribution of basic education to increase in farm productivity, reduction in fertility rates, enhancement of health and nutritional status of families and other quality of life indicators. The claims made in respect of social and economic returns especially from primary education are fairly well publicised and building a human capital base for development to realize these benefits has come to be accepted as a national priority by developing countries. Both on ethical and pragmatic considerations, education constitutes an indispensable element of development strategy and this has been acknowledged universally.

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[5] Atal, Yogesh, in *UNESCO and the World Summit for Social Development*, p. 89.

However, one should be cautious in understanding the precise nature of the relationship between education and development and the conditions that need to be satisfied to realize the full potential of education for effecting development and maximizing its beneficial social and economic returns. First, it should be noted that the relationship between education and development is not a linear, cause and effect relationship but an interactive one. The review of experience in China and India of progress in basic education and aspects of national development shows that there should not be an expectation of a direct and linear relationship between basic education and indicators of social and economic development such as productivity of farmers, rate of youth unemployment, population growth rate or infant and child mortality and life expectancy at birth. Further there is also a time dimension; benefits are more clearly evident in a historical perspective. Secondly, the beneficial impacts of basic education are dependent on the content and quality of basic education itself and its interaction with other social and economic factors influencing national development. It is clear that education that suffers from lack and poor quality of facilities – classrooms, teachers, instructional materials and the nature of curriculum transaction that takes place in the classrooms- can be of no help in attaining the objectives of development.[6] Education can be an effective instrument of social change only when it functions as a life empowering force by arming human individuals with the essential skills of literacy, numeracy, communication, problem solving and productive work. When so oriented, education can really make a difference in the life of the people in their earnings, agricultural productivity, fertility, child health, nutrition, knowledge, attitudes and values. Studies across countries and cultures have made strong claims in respect of these social and economic returns from basic education.

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[6] Ahmed, Manzoor, et al., *Basic Education and National Development* UNICEF, New York, 1991, p. 5.

Education and poverty eradication

The *World Development Report – 1990* on poverty points out that there is overwhelming evidence that human capital is one of the keys to reducing poverty. Improvements in education, health, nutrition directly address the worst consequences of being poor. Investing in human capital especially in education also attacks some of the most important causes of poverty. The most effective way to combat poverty is increasing the productivity of labour time which is the principal asset of the poor and education enhances this productivity. And in the "seamless web of interrelations" among social services, education plays the central role.

How potent an instrument can education be in fighting poverty, however, remains a matter of contention. It is argued by many that the problems of inequality and poverty depend ultimately on direct measures – economic, political, scientific and technological – aimed at eliminating them and the role of education, at best, is only facilitative. But it should be noted that even the best conceived technical solutions to poverty problems can be thwarted by deep-seated, social and cultural factors and by human communication barriers unless effective ways can be found to overcome these obstacles. It is common knowledge that in order for beneficial material changes to occur, the perceptions, attitudes and outlook of the people themselves must change. And this cannot happen without education.

According to others, illiteracy and poverty cause and reinforce each other and fundamental socio-economic changes in favour of the deprived cannot be effected by eradicating illiteracy alone. The role of literacy in poverty alleviation, again, has attracted considerable attention among literacy workers and social activists and varying views are expressed. It is argued that literacy is no "wonder drug" as made out to be and that the many benefits claimed for it are no more than myths. Be that as it may. It is no doubt the case that literacy on its own can be no remedy for poverty but literacy skills do constitute a necessary condition for the effectiveness of approaches to dealing with poverty. It is also argued that overcoming poverty calls for introduction of structural changes towards satisfaction of the basic needs of the poor as well as mobilization and organization of the poor to participate in political life. In this, education can operate only as a support to the organizational processes of deprived groups.

The role of education in poverty eradication has been a subject of debate for far too long. Notwithstanding the existence of divergent views both on the strategies and effectiveness of educational interventions, it has to be admitted that education and especially *basic* education can make significant contribution to poverty eradication and enhancement of quality of life. This role of education is generally acknowledged in development policies and strategies. Poverty alleviation packages invariably contain a social agenda dealing with human resource development through improvement of basic education and skill training. Also, in all poverty alleviation programmes there are elements of education aiming at raising the awareness of the poor on aspects of life that concern them most. Basically, the poor need to be conscious and articulate and assertive about their rights and needs. Their role as passive recipients should change to acting as a regular and active pressure group in the domains of the state. In this task education can embolden them to assert themselves for securing their rights and conscientize them.[7] The question, therefore, is not *whether* education has any role in poverty eradication but *what kind of education delivered in what manner under what kind of socio-political cultural context* can bring about positive changes with reference to development or poverty removal. However, before attempting an analysis of how and in what specific areas and ways basic education can contribute towards these social objectives, one should consider the more fundamental issues relating to poverty eradication such as, what constitutes poverty, what factors cause it and with what consequences.

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[7] Hossain, Mahbub., *Poverty Alleviation, Vol. 1, Report of the Task Forces on Bangladesh, 1993.*

Poverty: Causes and consequences

Educational interventions aimed at the eventual eradication of poverty should be duly informed by understanding of the poverty situation obtaining in different contexts with reference to its economic, political and socio-psychological dimensions. A broad description of the scenario of the poor in the Asia-Pacific region is given in the next chapter. Also the profile of learners – children, youth and adults-emerging from their poverty characteristics and implied learning needs are described in the Illustrative Frameworks of basic education programmes presented in Chapter 3. Here, without entering into detailed theoretical discussions, attention will be drawn to certain broad generalisations, to the extent these can be made, with respect to the causes, consequences and explanations of poverty more to indicate its multidimensional nature and provide a theoretical backdrop than to suggest prescriptive guidelines for policy formulation or designing of programme interventions. After all, poverty eradication strategies, educational or otherwise, should be specific to identified poverty contexts and guided by understanding of the problems the poor face with reference to economic, political, social and cultural contexts.

First, about the meaning of poverty itself. Poverty has been looked at from different angles, and depending upon the perspective adopted, the definition of poverty also shifts. Taking a purely quantitative and materialistic view poverty has been defined as "the inability to attain a minimal standard of living." Yardsticks for measuring the living standard include household items and expenditure per capita and also other dimensions of welfare like health, nutrition, life expectancy, under 5 mortality, literacy and school enrolment rates and access to public goods or common property resources. The 'poverty line' distinguishes those who can afford the minimal standard from those who cannot. The extent of poverty is indicated by head count (the number of poor falling below the poverty line) or by poverty gap (the income by which they fall short to cross the poverty threshold).

Poverty is also defined in relation to basic needs, as a situation where someone is not in a position to meet the basic needs of life. Although the dimensions of human needs are said to cover the economic as well as basic welfare aspects like education, health, sanitation, nutrition and various social, cultural, physical, moral and spiritual requirements both the precise specifications of the needs as well as what constitutes minimal standards vary from country to country and even from context to context within a country. Distinction is also made between the 'income poor' and 'capability poor' the latter referring to capability shortfalls in basic dimensions of human development: living a healthy, well nourished life, safe and healthy reproduction and being literate and knowledgeable. These different dimensions of poverty make it sufficiently clear that poverty cannot be explained in simple terms of not having enough money or access to material goods. It has also to do, and in a more important sense, with those deeper aspects of life relating to basic human values, culture and spirit. Poverty in this sense has as its ultimate reference the full flowering of the human potential in all its many sided manifestations, physical, intellectual, social, cultural, moral, aesthetic and spiritual. As the *Human Development Report* declared, "human development is the process of enlarging the range of people's choices-increasing the opportunities for education, healthcare, income and employment, and covering the full range of human choices from a sound physical environment to economic and political freedom."

Turning the question around one may ask: Who are the poor? What characteristics do they manifest? As far as the poor in the Asia-Pacific region are concerned, they share characteristics common to the poor everywhere. They also suffer from afflictions which emanate from region specific physical, economic, socio-cultural factors. Most of the poor are small landless farmers living in rural areas but increasingly they are found in the urban areas where they live in slums and eke out a living as self employed workers in the informal sector. They tend to be concentrated amongst women, children and youth, older persons, disabled persons, ethnic minorities and victims of disasters and conflicts. Illiteracy (the percentage being higher among women), malnutrition, poor health, low life expectancy, sub-standard housing, chronic unemployment or seasonal/under employment, landlessness, land shortage, low agricultural productivity, indebtedness, low wages in informal sector employment, break up of family resulting from migration to urban areas characterise their lives. A detailed analysis of the poverty situation is presented in the following chapter.

What causes poverty?, again, is too befuddling a question to elicit a straightforward answer. In the first place, the distinction between the causes, effects, consequences, afflictions and characteristics of poverty is not, in all cases, clear cut and easy to maintain. Illiteracy, for example, could be both a cause and consequence of poverty. Causes can also be distinguished as primary and secondary. What can, however, be safely stated is that there is no single cause that explains poverty fully. The major causes of poverty in the Asia-Pacific region have been identified as high population pressure, unemployment and under employment, low human capital development, lack of assets such as landlessness, lack of access to credit, natural calamities.[8] Sometimes it is said that poverty is the outcome of a complex interplay of macro-economic policies which results in the poor becoming poorer. On the other hand, it is argued that the basic cause of poverty is ignorance, lack of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are needed for working and living together. But ignorance itself may be due to illiteracy and lack of literacy makes the poor weak in the ability to communicate with others and causes their alienation from the society. The poor thus get trapped in the "vicious circle" of poverty.

The phenomenon of poverty is enmeshed in a complicated network of economic, psychological, sociological and cultural factors and cannot be satisfactorily explained with rough and ready theories. Poverty hypotheses, explanations and frameworks can be about its causes and processes well as about policies for dealing with it. Together, they are stated to constitute a "great chain" composed of many clashing as well as complementary beads.[9] Poverty is explained with reference to locality and demography (rural, large household size), economic structures and policies (economic growth rates and paths), social structures (ethnicity, social vulnerability, marginalization), culture (personal inadequacies of behaviour), poverty policies and concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the privileged. Poverty is also seen as a product of attitudes and of wealth, its ultimate resolution only accessible by confronting the human, non-economic causes in the realm of values.

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[8] Tan, Poo Chang, *op. cit.*

[9] Miller, S.M., in Oyen, Else, et, al (Eds.) *Poverty: A Global Review* Scandinavian University Press, UNESCO, 1996.

The foregoing review of poverty issues points to the enormity of the challenge that awaits poverty eradication efforts. Clearly indicated in this challenge are the hard social, political and economic actions to be taken with reference to people oriented landlaws, protection for the weaker sections, increasing employment and income generating opportunities, enhancement of capacity for labour and its productivity and provision of basic services – health, water supply, food security, nutrition, shelter, sanitation, education. But attacks on the external, causal conditions of poverty by themselves cannot take one far. *Even more important are frontal interventions that are aimed at transformation of the human beings themselves. It is precisely in this context that education acquires its significance.* Education contributes to the changing of human individuals not just in the managerial sense of developing human capital but in the more deeper sense of making new persons out of them, characterized by a heightened awareness of the human condition, positive and constructive outlook on life and a sense of commitment to human values. In other words education acts as a force that leads to the empowerment of human beings.

How basic education contributes towards empowerment of the poor

The concept and scope of basic education

The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) articulated the expanded concept of basic education as education that fulfils the basic learning needs of all – children at first level of education, youth who are out of school and adults requiring lifelong basic education support – through a variety of delivery systems, formal primary schooling, non formal/alternative schooling for those with limited or no access to formal schooling, literacy programmes and informal education. These basic learning needs "comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning." It is very clear from this explanation that eradication of poverty is not an objective or goal that is exogenous to basic education. On the other hand, it only makes explicit what is already contained in the definition of basic learning needs and imparts substantive content to the ideal of 'living and working in dignity' and all the principles that it entails.

Broad based literacy and basic education for all is the main foundation and the essential precondition for the improvement of the quality of life of the people and eventual eradication of poverty. In the countries of South-East Asian region literacy and basic education has been used to mean basic ability to read and write as the minimum basis for further learning. In the particular contexts where poverty is still predominant, literacy and basic education is perceived as a tool for empowering the clientele towards poverty eradication and improvement of quality of life.

Such literacy and basic education spans a wide range and variety of programmes catering to the diverse learning needs of all – children, youth and adults. Children in the pre-school age years who are not in any formal educational settings, require early childhood care and education support. Children of school going age need access to formal primary schools and children who are out of school for a variety of reasons need more flexible educational arrangements to meet their basic learning needs. Then, there are the youth and adults, illiterate, semi-literate, literate and with incomplete education requiring continuing education support in order to continue and sustain themselves as active and productive members of the society. It is within this overall perspective of human growth and development that literacy and basic education must be seen as part of the continuum of life long learning and the foundation for poverty eradication. *Implemented in letter and spirit basic education can be a life empowering experience for all and what the poor need most is empowerment.*

Empowering the poor

To "empower" a person, literally speaking, is to give power to the person. 'Power' here does not mean a mode of domination over others but a sense of internal strength and confidence to face life, the right to determine one's choices in life, the ability to influence the social processes that affect one's life and the direction of social change. The concept is employed with reference to individuals, population groups, institutions and organizations. Empowerment of women, for example, is to equip women with power. The underlying assumption is that women or whosoever are being empowered are lacking the requisite knowledge and skills to pursue desired goals or to effectively deal with inhibiting situations or circumstances. These goals could be in the spheres of securing gender justice or in fighting social customs that restrict development or in living oppression-free lives. Empowerment has, therefore, to be with concrete reference to the pursuit of a perceived goal or overcoming constricting forces in the way of leading a fulfilling life.

"Empowerment" of the poor is equipping the poor with power. In a broad sense, one can say that the poor need to be empowered in order to fight the many constraining afflictions of poverty. These afflictions could be illiteracy, poor health, illness, malnutrition, low income, destitution, low productivity, marginalized social position, low self-esteem and so on. However, although all poor generally share common characteristics and face similar problems, the specific nature of the problems they have to contend with differs according to region, gender, caste, ethnicity and other factors. For example, the poor who are victims of caste hierarchy face social isolation and discrimination in the community. Women across all categories face problems of gender discrimination that marginalizes them and subjugates them to male authority. The social customs relating to child rearing, education, marriage, occupation and other aspects of life inhibit the growth of women as free human individuals and make them the worst sufferers of poverty.

The empowerment of the poor has many dimensions to it depending upon how one defines poverty and standard of living. A purely quantitative and materialistic view of poverty as "inability to attain a minimal standard of living" may point to their empowerment with reference to income, housing, health, nutrition, and other basic needs. On the other hand if 'poverty' is not restricted to not having enough money or access to material goods and extended to other deeper aspects of life relating to basic human values, culture and spirit, the empowerment of the poor has to bring under its purview a much wider range of goods having to do with the full flowering of the human potential in all its dimensions – physical, intellectual, social, cultural, moral, aesthetic and spiritual. The poor, in this perspective, need empowerment not just in increasing income levels and access to material goods but also in spheres related to their total development as persons.

How basic education empowers the poor

Attacking ignorance

Implied in the concept of empowerment as acquisition of power to do something one wants to do are two fundamental assumptions. The first is that one knows how to go about achieving one's goal. The other is that at present one does not have the required power (resources) to achieve the goal. A prerequisite to empowerment, whether of individuals or groups, is therefore the eradication or at least reduction of ignorance.

Ignorance among the poor about the many aspects of the physical and social world around them may arise mainly from lack of access to information due to illiteracy. The poor may not know, for example, basic rules of health and hygiene, how to make use of basic services, what their basic human rights and freedoms are and how to exercise them, how to make use of cooperatives, credit and savings, what methods to adopt to increase farm or animal productivity. They may be unaware of the protection given to them under laws governing labour, land reforms, marriage and of the various measures instituted to alleviate their poverty in the form of anti-poverty projects and programmes. A first necessary step in such a case would be to provide such information and knowledge to the poor as would help them in availing of services, increasing their productivity, and organizing themselves to fight against exploitation. Empowerment of the poor entails the provision of access to such information and knowledge. But mere possession of information would not by itself give power to the poor. What is also needed is the capacity to convert information into useable knowledge for solving concrete problems.

Building skills

Helping the poor to know the 'what' and 'why' of things that affect their lives (for example production and marketing of goods) is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for their empowerment. What the poor also need is the necessary skills and other material and non-material resources required to attain their goals. Poor farmers may know the reasons for their poverty or why they are not able to increase the farm yield. They may know that they have to change their traditional practices and adopt new technologies. But they may not have acquired the skills to use new farm practices. They may also not have access to fertilisers and high quality seeds. More than all, they may not have the required capital to buy their requirements. What is needed in such a situation is the possession of skills – not just the technological ones but also skills related to effective management and resource generation – and the availability of other financial, material and non material resources required to attain the ends. Empowerment of the poor to fight their poverty should therefore include both these aspects of awareness building, and skill development and supply of resources.

Attitudes and values

One of the important causes of poverty (and a major constraint in combating it) is the negative attitudes and value system of the poor. The poor accept their poverty as inevitable, with resignation and fatalism. The poor are unorganized, suffer from low self-esteem and do not know how to work collectively, cooperatively. They are unaware of their rights and afraid to assert their claim to justice. Empowerment would imply, under these circumstances, building of positive attitudes and values like self-confidence, and cooperation and emboldening the poor to collectively fight against exploitation.

Meeting the learning needs of poverty groups

In more specific terms, basic education contributes to the empowerment of the poor by addressing their very special learning needs. Research findings on the economic, sociological, cultural and psychological dimensions of poverty and the critical analysis of poverty characteristics, causes and consequences point to these needs as:

- ☐ Literacy, numeracy, problem solving and productivity skills to enhance capacity for labour and to creatively respond to income earning opportunities.

- ☐ Knowledge and skills required for healthful living, use of new techniques of production and intelligent and sustainable use of natural and environmental resources.
- ☐ Awareness of their right to self-hood, to independent thought and decision making and their own role for their development with reference to education, health, family size, occupational pursuits.
- ☐ Overcoming ignorance, superstition, fatalism, attitude of indifference, enhancement of self-esteem, development of the value of cooperative living, ability to take positive initiatives and actions on their own behalf.

Although these needs may be taken as common, they manifest differently in different groups of learners viz. children, youth, adults. Basic education in its different forms-formal primary schooling for children, non formal education for youth and literacy training and adult education for adults – addresses the specific needs of different learner groups and contributes towards their empowerment paving the way for the eradication of poverty.

Under what conditions can basic education effectively empower the poor?

The full potential of basic education in empowering the poor can be realised only when certain necessary conditions are fulfilled. First, a broad and functional view of education should be taken transcending traditional processes and institutional structures and covering the entire spectrum of activities and processes that govern the life of the community. In this perspective, literacy training and formal learning become instruments of empowerment which the poor use in fighting the causes and adversities of poverty. Secondly, basic education programmes should evolve from the developmental needs of the community as an integral component of overall community development. Thirdly, basic education can be effective in combating poverty to the extent it is supported by and works in a synergistic alliance with other social, economic, cultural, political interventions. Lastly, educational functionaries and front-line workers including literacy personnel, non formal education instructors and teachers should go beyond their conventional roles and function as "development agents" working in cooperation with learners, parents, other officials and the community members as partners in a common cause. Such facilitating conditions can be fostered by launching actions at several levels and on several fronts – internal transformation of formal primary schooling and other programmes of basic education, early childhood development support, in-community actions by teachers and other front-line workers in literacy training and continuing education, involvement of parents, mobilization of the community, in-school curricular and cocurricular activities, coordination of basic education with other basic services and organizing women as a group.

The transformation of on going basic education programmes would itself call for actions at several points and levels. The intervention possibilities cover i) goal orientation affirming empowerment of the poor as a priority objective of basic education programmes; ii) a range of actions to make programme contents particularly sensitive and responsive to needs of poverty groups like making curricula poverty groups specific, reordering priorities and weightages among curricular objectives, strengthening relevant curricular inputs and enhancing poverty sensitivity of learning contents; iii) adoption of pedagogies built around learner empowerment and teacher commitment and poverty group friendly teaching-learning materials; iv) reorientation of teacher training; v) decentralized educational management; vi) convergence of services and vii) community ownership of literacy and basic education programmes.

Tailoring basic education towards empowerment of the poor – the need

The problem of extending quality basic education for all in the countries of Asia and the Pacific is essentially one of catering to the basic learning needs of the poor and marginalized population groups – those living in rural and remote, resource poor areas, difficult urban contexts like slums and squatter settlements, ethnic, racial minorities, refugees, nomadic groups, street children, women and girls cutting across all categories. What characterises all these groups is their absolute poverty and below subsistence level living.

Half of the world's poor live in South Asia alone and the vast majority of world's illiterate population (two thirds of which is accounted for by the countries of the Asia and Pacific region) and unschooled primary school age children live in poor, underserved, disadvantaged rural and remote habitations. If basic education, which is considered to be a major element in development planning and human resource development is to make a meaningful change in the lives of these people, it cannot do so unless the design and strategies of the different basic education programmes are specifically geared to the needs and conditions of these population groups, especially their absolute poverty and low living standards. There is good reason to believe that literacy and basic education programmes which are designed keeping in view the real needs of learners contribute positively towards improving people's life style and standard of living. As already mentioned, the social and economic returns from basic education are claimed to be quite significant. Exposure to literacy alone has been shown to contribute significantly towards increasing the level of awareness among farmers about agricultural information and knowledge and eventually impact positively on their farm productivity. Literacy and basic education is believed to make people conscious of their health and hygiene. Fertility rates are claimed to come down among those who attain a certain level of literacy and primary schooling.

But more important than all these claims of visible effects, basic education has the potential to contribute to sustainable human development by aiming at the transformation of the human beings themselves. It aims not just at treating the symptoms of poverty and deprivation but at the removal of the deeper causes that lie in the realm of human beings' sense of values and in their interaction among themselves and with nature. Basic education contributes to the changing of the human individuals not just in the economic sense of developing human capital but in the larger sense of contributing towards their empowerment characterized by enhanced internal strength and confidence to face life.

A review of ongoing basic education programmes in the region points out several inadequacies and short comings from the point of view of empowerment of the poor. Most children enrolled in basic education programmes are from among the poor. For most of them stay in the primary school is the only opportunity for a formal education.

Considerations of relevance alone would demand that primary schooling serve their needs well and that poverty issues as appropriate at this stage be addressed strongly. But the major focus in current formal and non formal primary schooling is not on empowerment. Existing primary education designs have not fully freed themselves from the colonial academic pattern and their objectives do not reflect aspects that are essential for social transformation. The curricula lack flexibility to accommodate poverty eradication concerns. There is no strategy to organize primary education as a self sustaining and life empowering experience by linking it to the world of work. Primary schooling, the main delivery channel of basic education for the masses has been dominated by the requirements of entrance to the secondary school in its content and curricular focus. This distortion of goals and processes has made primary education irrelevant from the point of view of empowerment of the poor.

As far as non formal primary education is concerned, its existing duration ranging from 2 to 3 years is found to be insufficient to develop both the life skills and learning skills necessary for continuing one's learning in the formal system. The curriculum should respond to new interventions in science and technology and explore possibilities of applying them to rural and urban development, poverty alleviation, relating education to the world of work and quality of life and sustainable development.

Current literacy and adult education programmes are looked upon essentially as "educational" programmes that address poverty concerns, if at all, only marginally. There are deep rooted inadequacies in the design and implementation of these programmes. The programme contents lack 'teeth' to address poverty eradication concerns with force. They do not cover the multi-dimensional needs of the poor and are generally presented as bits of information. The focus is on knowledge and there is little effort on skill or attitude development. Literacy programmes are organized as single package interventions to impart literacy, numeracy skills only. Traditional rote learning with no opportunity for learners to interact, to analyse information to understand their poverty situation or to develop decision making skills, characterizes the typical adult education learning setting. At best, the empowerment issue is treated marginally and only in the periphery of curricular and pedagogic considerations of most ongoing literacy and basic education programmes in the region. This weakness of basic education programmes should be overcome and efforts made to address poverty eradication and quality of life issues more directly and with force.

The plea to focus basic education content and processes on empowering the poor should not, however, be taken to mean that an inferior kind of education and lower level curricular objectives are being recommended for the poor or that the 'universal' character of basic education is being questioned. To dispel such misgivings it should be reiterated that basic education is education that is designed to meet the basic learning needs of all human beings. These needs, as already mentioned, comprise literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving and knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by all human beings for their development as individuals and participating members in the society. Further, the point and purpose of satisfaction of these needs is the empowerment of individuals in any society and conferring upon them a responsibility to contribute towards social good. *What is being demanded now is translation of this noble intent of basic education into practical action from the point of view of the large number of learners from poverty groups and the larger interests of all.* It is heartening that the Delhi Declaration of the nine high population developing nations recognized that the content and methods of education must be developed to serve the basic learning needs of individuals and societies, to empower them to address their most pressing problems – combating poverty, raising productivity, improving living conditions and protecting the environment.

Explicit declaration of empowerment of the poor as a direct concern of basic education and its conscious pursuit will have several advantages. Firstly, it gives a concrete direction to shape the design and strategies of basic education programmes towards the real life needs of the learners. The target groups would find basic education programmes oriented to address their here and now poverty problems more relevant and meaningful to their needs and are more likely to participate in them effectively. Further, a concrete goal orientation to basic education would impart specificity and focus to curriculum planning, teaching – learning activities and materials and teacher training. It would also impart 'a cutting edge' to the entire basic educational process and situate it in a concrete context, the context of poverty, in which to show results.

About the present study

This study is about basic education especially as it relates to issues concerning poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor in the context of sustainable human development. Its central concern is to explore and examine, with specific reference to the Asia-Pacific context, how basic education in its different forms-literacy training and continuing education, formal primary schooling and non formal primary education – can be used to empower the poor and contribute towards the eradication of poverty. The overall purpose of the exercise is to present a perspective for basic education programmes which would indicate directions for changes in basic education policies as well as the designing and implementation of programme specific interventions with a view to direct the thrusts of the programmes on identified learning needs of children, youth and adults belonging to poverty groups. Such a programme perspective has to emerge from an analytical study of country experiences specially with regard to what is currently being done in terms of policies, practices and programmes to relate literacy training and basic education more directly with poverty and quality of life concerns. Even more important, it should develop from an understanding of the poverty and basic education situation as it obtains in the Asia-Pacific context with respect to both its theoretical and empirical dimensions.

The study was initiated with the preparation of a conceptual framework on reorienting literacy and basic education towards poverty eradication and improvement of quality of life based on a comprehensive analysis of the state of the art of basic education and in consultation with specialists from various partners including UNDP, UNICEF and other agencies which actively support basic education programmes in the region. The framework provided a background analysis of poverty issues, the role of basic education in eradicating poverty, a conceptual matrix of different parameters which need to be considered in the desired reorientation of basic education programmes and a design which outlined the kinds of possible interventions towards this end supported by theoretical rationale. The framework was then circulated among countries participating in the study for field testing. Lead research and development institutions in basic education in these countries served as nodal centres and carried out study, trialling and validation of the framework and its applicability to the country context through in-country consultations involving teachers, curriculum specialists, educational planners and decision makers, local leaders and community workers. Emanating from this country level trialling and validation each nodal institution prepared detailed reports outlining specific suggestions and comments on how the Framework could be enriched and improved further. On compilation of the country specific reports, two Technical Consultations one each for South Asia and South East Asia and a consultant report about the Pacific involving project team leaders from the lead institutions and education specialists active in literacy and basic education programmes were organized and prepared to study and examine the country reports, synthesise their salient features and make recommendations for action in the participating countries within the framework of an inter-country cooperative programme. These sub-regional syntheses of findings and recommendations were then comprehensively reviewed and a regional synthesis prepared for designing strategic policy and programme interventions for reorienting basic education towards empowerment of the poor. The draft synthesis was further examined by a group of experts involving basic education scholars and practitioners from the region. The study in its present form is the result of analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the field data at different levels enriched by insights gained through desk study of relevant documents, reports, studies on policies, programmes and practices and interactions with educational planners, administrators, social scientists and activists in the field. As a follow-up, national level dissemination seminars on the subject are scheduled to be organized by country focal points which carried out the country studies and the feedback from these seminars will be compiled and incorporated as an addendum to this document.

The study is organized around four chapters. The following chapter begins with an overview of the Asia-Pacific region to indicate the extent and the nature of the poverty in the region. Against this background an attempt has been made to gain an understanding of the poor by describing what appear to be their main characteristics. This is followed by an examination of basic education in the region from the perspective of its present and potential contribution to poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor. Towards the end trends and possible directions for development of basic education for empowerment of the poor and their action implications as perceived by selected countries are presented.

The perspective for combating poverty by empowering the poor through basic education programmes is outlined in Chapter 3. First, principles and strategies that apply to basic education in general are discussed. These cover early child development, attacking feminization of poverty, reorientation of formal primary schooling, building school as an institution of community empowerment, work orientation of basic education, integrating basic services with basic education and decentralized planning and management of basic education. This is followed by a discussion on reorientation of goals and objectives, programme contents, teaching-learning methods and materials, evaluation of learning outcomes and training of teachers and learning mediators for directing the thrusts of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor. At the end, illustrative programme frameworks are provided in respect of formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training and continuing education. The matrices presented cover salient features of the programmes, clientele characteristics, poverty profiles of learners, implied learning needs and suggested programme interventions.

The last chapter outlines action implications of the various general and programme specific proposals emerging from the discussion, specific actions that can be launched under key action areas and modalities for intercountry collaborative support.

This book is intended to serve multiple purposes. It can serve as a policy document and programme framework for the education component of inter-country programme with its focus on reorientation of basic education towards empowerment of the poor as a strategy for the eradication of poverty among the countries of the region. It can also serve as a reference document for consultations with selected governments, academic bodies, NGOs, UN and other international donors and partners active in the promotion of basic education in the Asia-Pacific region. But primarily the book addresses at the country level, the needs of key decision makers in government ministries and departments, NGOs and other organizations involved in the formulation of basic education policies, designing of programmes, development of curricula and the orientation and training of teachers and other educational personnel. This, however, should not be taken to mean that a segmented approach is being recommended to deal with a problem which by its very nature calls for cooperative and convergent action on the part of all whose primary concern is development in its totality – health, nutrition, family welfare, rural development, environment, social welfare and basic education. On the other hand, the study is based on the firm conviction that educational actions however well conceived and well intended cannot by themselves succeed in impacting poverty unless they are also strongly backed by, in a mutually supporting arrangement, coordinated actions by all other development sectors. The principle that informs this whole exercise is that education can function as a propellant of social change only under conditions where it is supported by and combined in a synergistic alliance with the other social, economic, cultural and political interventions. From this perspective, this book should prove useful to decision makers in other development sectors as well at least to the extent of helping them to understand and appreciate the nature, point and purpose of educational interventions and to all others who keep their faith pinned on human development to usher in a better future for all.

Chapter 2

POVERTY AND BASIC EDUCATION THE ASIA-PACIFIC SCENARIO

Poverty in the region

Incidence of poverty

The vast region that makes up Asia and the Pacific is spread over a diversity of land and oceanic zones. The region accounts for a little over 61 percent of the world's population of approximately 5.716 billion people[1]. The countries vary widely in terms of size of population, geographic area and setting (comprising mountainous mainlands, plain lands and oceanic islands), cultural heterogeneity, political system and economic development.

While poverty has many dimensions, it is generally the income which is used in a preliminary identification of the poor. The Human Development Report 1997[2] states that of the 1.3 billion people in this world who live on less than $1 a day, 950 million (73%) are in this region. On this criterion alone a little more than a quarter of the total population of this region are poor. Of the many dimensions of poverty, the Human Development Report 1997 has selected a few to calculate a Human Poverty Index as described in the following extract.

> The variables used are the percentage of people expected to die before age 40, the percentage of adults who are illiterate, and

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[1] Based on midyear estimates given in ESCAP. Statistical Year Book for Asia and the Pacific, 1996. UN, 1997.

[2] UNDP. Human Development Report 1997. Oxford University Press, 1997.

> overall economic provisioning in terms of the percentage of people without access to health services and safe water and the percentage of underweight children under five. (p. 14)

The HPI rankings for the developing countries of the region are as follow for the countries where the data was available.

Table 1. HPI ranking for selected countries

Country	HPI Value (%)	Country	HPI Value (%)
Singapore	6.6	Myanmar	31.2
Thailand	11.7	P.N.G.	32.0
Mongolia	15.7	India	36.7
China	17.5	Lao P.D.P.	40.1
Philippines	17.7	Bhutan	46.3
Sri Lanka	20.7	Pakistan	46.8
Indonesia	20.8	Bangladesh	48.3
Vietnam	26.2	Cambodia	52.5

Source: Table 1.1, UNDP. Human Development Report 1997, Oxford University Press, 1997.

How this index may be interpreted is given by the Human Development Report 1997 as follows:

> ...The HPI provides a measure of the incidence of human poverty in a country (or among some other group), say 25%. This means that judged by the HPI, an "average" of some 25% of the country's population is affected by the various forms of human poverty or deficiency included in the measure.[3]

The figures given above show the wide variation of the extent of poverty within the region. The figures also make it very evident that size of the total population of a country is not a barrier to reducing poverty as may be judged by the value of the index for China and India.

While the HPI values are not available for all the countries of the region, the Report gives the values of some relevant variables for the Asia

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[3] UNDP. Human Development Report 1997. Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 19.

Pacific Region, presented in Table 2, which are very useful in understanding the situation in the region with respect to poverty.

The number of illiterate adults given in Table 2 confirms the prediction made in a recent APPEAL study that, "... if present policies continue, the trend is likely to continue to remain until the turn of the century. While the number of literate adults will substantially increase, the population of illiterates is likely to remain between 500 and 600 million." [4] According to the study the reasons for this situation are the increase in population accompanied by the failure of the formal/non formal education system in some countries of the region to cater to all in the compulsory education age-group.

Considering the access to health services and to safe water it should be noted that in the developed world these are taken for granted for the whole population. In such a context the magnitude of the deficiency as shown by the above figures where millions lack these basic necessities indicate the enormous task ahead if the population in this region is to have what is taken for granted elsewhere. It is also very likely that those who lack these basic services are also the illiterate. Of the 1.2 billion in developing countries without access to safe water, 790 million or 65% are in this region. Excluding Cyprus and Turkey, of the 766 million without access to health services, 205 million or 27% are in this region. [5]

As may be expected there is some association between maternal mortality rate and access to health services. South Asia has a rate which is nearly six times that of East Asia with South-East Asia and the Pacific following closely behind. The extreme poverty in the region may be gauged by the fact that the rate for most developed countries is under 10, whereas for South-East Asia it is 95.

Of 158 million malnourished children under 5 years of age in the developing countries (excluding Cyprus and Turkey), 119 million or 75%

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[4] Sakya, T.M. and Meyer, G.R. *Challenges of EDUCATION FOR ALL in Asia and the Pacific and the APPEAL Response* UNESCO PROAP, Bangkok, 1997, p. 8.

[5] UNDP. Human Development Report 1997. Oxford University Press, 1997. p. 27.

Table 2. Human poverty in the region
(millions)

Region	Illiterate adults 1995	People lacking access to health services 1990-95	People lacking access to safe water 1990-96	Mal-nourished children under 5 1990-96	Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) 1990	People not expected to survive to age 40 1990s
East Asia						
(No. in millions)	167	144	398	17	95	81
(% of respective pop.)	(17.8)	(12)	(32)			(8.9)
South Asia						
(No. in millions)	407	264	230	82	554	184
(% of respective pop.)	(49.6)	(22)	(18)			(19.9)
South-East Asia and the Pacific						
(No. in millions)	38	69	162	20	447	52
(% of respective pop.)	(12.3)	(15)	(35)			(15.1)
TOTAL	**612**	**477**	**790**	**119**	**–**	**317**

Source: Adapted from Table 2.2 and Annex Table A 2.1 of Human Development Report 1997. Oxford University Press, 1997.

are in this region.[6] This also reflects the situation that this region contains 61% of the total world population. Obviously malnourished children do not live in isolation. In all probability they are the children of illiterate parents who are also without access to basic services.

The Human Development Report also gives other relevant data. The percentage of children not reaching grade 5 (1990-1995) are 12 for East Asia, 39 for South Asia and 16 for South-East Asia and the Pacific respectively.[7] It is generally agreed that 4 years of schooling are necessary if one is to retain literacy. These figures therefore indicate that substantial numbers of children will relapse into illiteracy if at all they acquired it.

Within this overall picture of poverty, women and girls are distinctly worse off than males. The female illiteracy rates expressed as a percentage of the male rate are 249 for East Asia, 157 for South Asia and 198 for South-East Asia and the Pacific respectively.[8] It is women who suffer more from lack of access to health services and safe water. The high maternal mortality rate is an indication. It is the women who have to fetch the water which as it appears is not even safe. While such data is not available it is very likely that most of the women in the poverty group are malnourished.

Characteristics of the poor in the region

The poor in the many different countries of the region have several characteristics in common. The countries also have certain similarities with respect to their poor in spite of the significant differences between the countries.

Generally the poor are mostly *illiterate* or of relatively low educational status. They also have a *low income.* These characteristics are among those used in their preliminary identification.

In no country are the poor spread evenly throughout. Even though a country as a whole may be considered poor, yet within the country there are areas where the poor are concentrated. There are *pockets of poverty.*

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid. p. 56.

[8] Ibid. p. 60.

In most countries of the region, *the poor population is highly concentrated in rural areas.* Rural poverty, however, is distinct from urban poverty. In rural areas the poor people depend mostly upon land; either they possess land – however small – or they sell their labour on others' land. Sometimes the two are combined. In urban areas, on the other hand, the poor depend largely on the informal sector. They meet their everyday needs through providing goods or services to others. This informal economy is largely absent in the rural areas. For this reason, it is sometimes found that the income of the poor in urban areas, in terms of cash, is higher than that of the rural poor; which naturally encourage the latter to migrate.

The poor in many countries *live in relatively remote areas or in isolation.* Most poor families live far from roads in rural remote areas and thus have restricted access to information, public services and markets.

Without good road transport, costs are often high. Inputs are hard to obtain and products (farm or non-farm) have to be sold at the local market only at poor prices. They do not have the scope to get information about the changes of prices in the market and benefit from that. While the market economy grows, these isolated poor populations who lack the 'sophisticated' knowledge find it harder to compete and make 'complicated decisions' and be part of the process.

High concentration of the poor in rural areas, increasing landlessness and lack of work in the agricultural sector have led to a higher rate of *migration from rural to urban areas* in search of a better livelihood. But because of the lack of technical skills required in the urban organized sector, lack of training and retraining facilities to acquire the skills needed and lack of alternate economic opportunities, poverty in urban areas continues to be severe.

Though meant for all, the poor have *limited access to basic public services.* Either the services remain inaccessible to them or they can not afford the services. In all countries of the region, 'universal primary education' and 'health for all' have been two very common programmes meant for all the citizens. But education still remains out of reach of many of the poor children, particularly girls in the rural areas, in urban slums, and in the ethnic minority communities. Those who enroll can not continue for social and economic reasons as well as for the reasons of in-built inefficiency of the education system.

In terms of access to safe water, health care, sanitation, information on socio-economic development, the physical isolation of rural poor and social isolation of the urban poor make it difficult for them to use these services. The poor mostly use, and sometimes drink, unsafe water; the health centres remain a long way from them with difficult road communication or outreach health services are mostly not available to them – they do not see the local health workers; they can not afford the cost of treatment; mostly they use open latrines (This, coupled with use of open water sources causes increasing numbers to suffer from water-borne diseases.); information disseminated through mass media very rarely reach them. Thus they know little about the trends of macro-economic and social and legal reforms that are being taken by the governments for their 'benefit'.

The poor have a *high population growth rate* and a *low health and nutrition status.* Population growth rate among the poor is comparatively higher than the average national rate. With little birth spacing, the percentage of younger population remains quite high. This results in increasing numbers of dependents on single or limited bread-winners.

High population growth, high infant mortality rate, high maternal mortality rate, low caloric intake are some of the few common characteristics relating to the health of the poor in the region. Poor sanitary disposal and lack of hygiene awareness are associated with high incidence of diarrhoea and disease. Water-borne diseases such as typhoid and cholera are still endemic problems in many countries of the region. At the national level, however, many countries have shown substantial achievement in controlling population growth, lowering infant mortality rate, immunising children. But many of the poor in the remote areas and among ethnic minorities still remain out of reach of these efforts. The physical and intellectual isolation keeps their health status in a poor condition.

The poor are *exposed to many risks and hazards* both on account of their living conditions as well as the occupations they are compelled to engage in. The appalling living conditions of the poor – particularly the ventilation, use of unsafe water and poor sanitation – expose them to constant diseases. The urban poor squatters living in slums and the migrants are more exposed to risky living conditions. They live in appalling houses in thickly populated and highly polluted areas – by the side of industrial waste, garbage disposal points or along the disposal drains. They have no access to basic services and lead a kind of isolated life. The urban poor are thus more at risk of health hazards, victims of organized social crimes and are more exposed to HIV/AIDS.

The poor are generally *landless.* In the majority of the countries in the region there is an unequal distribution of land aggravated by a continuous increase in the number of people who need land. The urban poor being mostly a floating population, the question of land ownership is not a major issue. In the rural areas, some poor populations possess very nominal quantum of land (may be homestead only or little additional land) which can not support the family.

The poor *lack capital,* both cash to invest and skill to get higher wages. The poor are mostly engaged in the agricultural sector in rural areas either as marginal farmers or agricultural labourers. A small number of them are, however, engaged in small trading or in some other informal types of work. In the agricultural sector the work is more seasonal – mostly during sowing and harvesting – resulting in the poor having no work for some time of the year. The unskilled poor labourers are compelled to sell their labour at low wages. Whatever little they earn, *most of it is spent on food.*

They do not have access to skill development facilities and thus *remain unskilled during their lifetime.* Had the landless poor access to skills training or to working capital they could have participated in the market economy, even in a small scale, to mitigate their poverty. There are various government programmes to provide credit to poor families, but many of these large scale programmes do not reach the hard core poor.

The poor often lack collateral for institutional credit and are not regarded as good prospects for recovery. The poor people also do not feel confident to use loan procedures and become reluctant to borrow. The women are the worst sufferers in this situation.

Poverty in ethnic minority populations is high in most countries of the region, because of their physical and cultural isolation.

Due to various social and legal discriminations against them, *women and girls are particular victims of poverty.* Stereotyped divisions of work, in many countries, have typically prepared men for leadership or clerical/technical positions whereas women were educated in home care, hygiene and the like. Women who attempt to break out of such a gender stereotyping risk severe cultural hardship. In many societies, girls and women are culturally so conditioned that they unquestionably accept their *subordinate status* in home and in society. Even legal discrimination against women exists.

Girls in the remote areas and in the ethnic minority communities suffer from isolation with traditional household responsibilities, traditional early marriage and child bearing being their lot. They get very little scope to develop their life on an equal footing with the males.

Children from the poor families suffer both physically and psychologically. Malnutrition forces them to start life with ill health, impairs their development and reduces their resistance to diseases. They are needed to join the adult members of the family for earning their livelihood. In the rural areas they join in the field work and in the urban areas they go for rag-picking, load carrying or some other work in the informal sector to earn some money to supplement the family income. Girls mostly do household work, care for younger siblings and work as maids in other houses. The children either do not get an opportunity to go to school or have to drop out before completion of the elementary education. The poor parents either can not afford to spare them for schools or are unable to bear expenses for books, uniforms and other items for keeping them in schools. The children in poor families thus remain at risk of growing up as illiterate and being the probable poor of the future.

The poor whether in rural or urban areas are always *victims of exploitation.* In the rural areas, as poor families have no access to institutional credit for the purchase of inputs, they go to the money-lenders who exploit them with very high rates of interest. At times the poor farmer becomes unable to repay the debt and loses the land to the moneylender. The landless labourer gets a lower wage, because (s) he does not have any other option. The legal provision for minimum wage (as introduced in Bangladesh) does not help them, because the poor are not organized to bargain. The women are the worst victims in terms of wages. Mostly they are paid very low. In the urban areas also the abundant supply of labour leads to a lower wage rate. Also the poor, particularly the youth, are being used by anti-social agents for their evil activities like drug trafficking, political hooliganism.

The poor are prone to *cultural exploitation* due to their poverty, deep-rooted conventions, social taboos etc. The stereotype division of work between men and women, traditional social responsibility, classification of people into different groups (clans, castes etc.) fuel the process of exploitation of the poor (and women). Any attempts to break out of these are severely resisted by vested interests in the society, who always want to maintain their position. Again, the poor sometimes are circumstantially compelled to observe some ceremonies or festivals which they can not afford but have to observe. These 'unwanted' expenses make them poorer still. Again, the people in the remote areas have very limited access to information about changes in the social and political life. Whatever information is available in the area, is not communicated properly to the poor. The vested interests confine it to themselves or misinterpret it to suit their own interest.

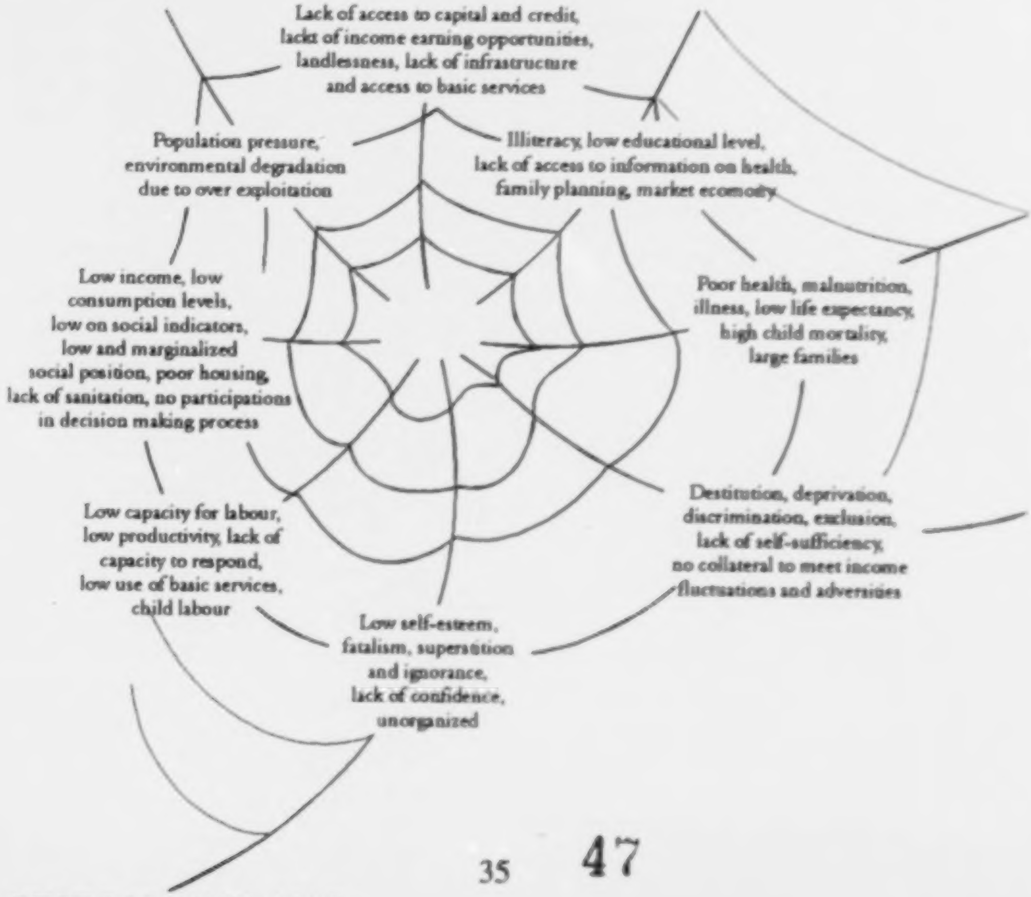
The poor have *a low status in society.* They can not join in the decision making process. Different community development plans are finalised either by the leaders in the society or by the officials of the government or non-government agencies. Though these decisions or plans are directly related to the lives of these poor peoples, they are not asked for their opinion. The poor also do not feel confident in giving their opinions or making comments, though they are part of the electorate, partly because of their ignorance of the developments around them.

The women from poor families are lagging doubly behind, because they are women and are poor. It is the same with the ethnic minority groups. Because of their physical and cultural isolation they do not enjoy equal opportunities in the society. In societies where people are divided into castes, the situation is worse.

The Web of poverty

Poverty may be likened to a web in which people are caught. Some manage to escape through their own efforts. Others have to be helped. There is the question as to who weaves the web. Perhaps the most acceptable answer is that it is a collective enterprise of both the non-poor and the poor. At this stage it may be possible to identify some of the major strands of the web. Some may not be visible yet. New strands may be woven which perhaps may be more difficult to destroy. Education is a powerful means to understand the structure of the web and also to destroy some of the strands.

The Poverty Web


Lack of access to capital and credit, lackt of income earning opportunities, landlessness, lack of infrastructure and access to basic services
Population pressure, environmental degradation due to over exploitation
Illiteracy, low educational level, lack of access to information on health, family planning, market ecomomy
Low income, low consumption levels, low on social indicators, low and marginalized social position, poor housing, lack of sanitation, no participations in decision making process
Poor health, malnutrition, illness, low life expectancy, high child mortality, large families
Low capacity for labour, low productivity, lack of capacity to respond, low use of basic services, child labour
Destitution, deprivation, discrimination, exclusion, lack of self-sufficiency, no collateral to meet income fluctuations and adversities
Low self-esteem, fatalism, superstition and ignorance, lack of confidence, unorganized

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Basic education programmes in the region

If at all there are educational services for the poor, it is basic education comprising formal primary, non formal primary and literacy and continuing education. The facts that of the world's 885 million illiterates (1995), 625 million (71%)[9] are in this region and that of the total number of children out of school around a half are also in this region indicate that the educational services for the poor are inadequate. That ignorance, lack of skills and poor attitude are significant causes of poverty suggest that the quality of whatever services exist is also suspect. A deeper examination of each component is essential if basic education is to be re-designed to support poverty eradication and the empowerment of the poor. What follows is a brief survey which highlights some of the major deficiencies.

Formal primary education

In all countries, gross enrollments of children in the primary schools have increased and enrollment coverage in most of the countries is high. But the gap which remains to achieve universal coverage is with respect to the poorer communities or families in remote and isolated areas, populations in disadvantageous situations, nomadic communities or street children.

Enrollment of girls and children in the rural areas has increased in recent years, but still the ratio is disproportionate to the enrollment of boys and children in urban or suburban areas respectively. Location of the schools are not always within convenient distance of the girls and small children, particularly those in the interior villages, less developed communities, societies with restriction on the movement of the girls, and in hilly areas. Of 36.8% children out of school in South Asia, 65.9% are girls.[10]

Of those children who are enrolled in the schools, a significant portion leave without completing primary schooling. The situation is particularly acute in the South Asian countries and certain South-East Asian countries. In rural and remote areas where the literacy rates and enrollment ratios are comparatively lower than the national average, drop-out rates are high. The rates are highest among disadvantaged groups such as tribal people, scheduled castes and among girls in rural areas. Incomplete primary schools, not covering the whole cycle also cause a large number of drop-outs.

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[9] UNESCO. World Education Report 1995. UNESCO, 1995. Table 2, p. 104.

[10] UNESCO – PROAP, APPEAL. Education for All in South Asia. Mid-decade Review of Progress Towards Education for All. UNESCO – PROAP, 1996. Table 3, p. 19.

The general condition of the rural schools in the region, particularly in South Asia, is not congenial for good learning. Poor physical facilities, lack of teaching aids, irregular teacher attendance, traditional teaching methods constitute barriers to improving the rural education systems. The curriculum of the formal primary education is more aimed at preparing the children for higher education, in spite of the fact that for a large portion of the children it remains terminal. Most countries still need to establish an effective system for the assessment and monitoring of learning competencies. Terminal examinations are deep-rooted in the education systems in the whole region and measure mostly memory and very rarely the higher order cognitive objectives.

Teachers concentrate more on preparing the children for the final or term examinations rather than helping them to acquire competencies needed in their daily lives. Education in the region is more 'teaching' than 'learning'. The learners do not get much scope to learn through interactive processes. Curriculum contents are delivered through theoretical and abstract rote learning, without relating these to the day to day life situation, thus making the learner incapable of applying the knowledge in practical life. The classes are more teacher dominated (even the teaching kits remain unutilised in most cases). Recitation, memorisation and rote learning dominate the teaching-learning situation in the classroom. Since the teaching-learning process is not learner centred it does not address the individual points of difficulty of the learners. As a result, even after participating in the full course, achievement remains at minimum level. The information provided in the text or instructional materials is not communicated and the objectives of bringing change in behaviour and attitude remain unfulfilled. Achievement in terms of reading and writing even after completion of full cycle of primary of schooling is not encouraging. The EFA mid-decade consultation concluded: '..if one applies the usual rule of thumb – that completion of four years of primary schooling is required to ensure an enduring level of literacy – it is evident that even this modest goal is not being achieved in a number of countries of the region.'

Another area of concern is that increased enrollment has led to over-crowding of the schools and double and, in some cases, even triple shifts are being held. The ultimate consequence is limiting the contact time or increasing the pupil-teacher ratio and affecting the quality of education.

Non formal primary education

Non formal primary education centres are being organized to enrol the out-of-school children and the drop-outs, as an alternate channel of primary education. Because of flexibility of timing and proximity of these centres children from poorer sections of the society and the girls are enrolled in these centres. With lower pupil-teacher ratio (generally 30:1), these education centres have very nominal drop out and high rate of transfer to the formal schools.

The unattractive environment of the classes is a major area of concern. The general condition of these classes in the countries of South Asia, for example, is that they are organized in individual out-houses or in any places available in the area. There is an absence of facilities, both in terms of accommodation and learning resources.

There is a general lack of planning for professional development of the teachers in this sector. The teachers are recruited from the project areas from among those who agree to work on a voluntary basis or with a very nominal allowance. Generally with educational qualification of 8-10 years of schooling and around a week's training, these teachers take up the work as an ad hoc task. However, there are teachers who take initiatives on their own and create a good learning environment in the centres. Experience shows that in situations where the teachers could take initiative for participatory learning, the centres function very well and the output is of good quality.

Literacy and continuing education

While most countries have literacy, post-literacy and continuing education programmes in place they suffer from several deficiencies which have been identified in a recent study under APPEAL.[11] The following are among the key factors which have been identified as having contributed to the failure of some countries of the region to eradicate adult illiteracy.

Many countries lacked a nation-wide infrastructure for adult literacy programmes. This has led to un-coordinated efforts by many different agencies such as various governmental and non-governmental agencies, community organizations and hindered a comprehensive coverage. The lack of access to the poor is evident from the growing number of illiterates in the region even though the proportion of illiterates in the region is decreasing. The increase in population, which adds to the illiterates, particularly among the poor, is apparently not taken care of.

Associated with this was the absence of a nationally recognized adult literacy curriculum framework that defined standards and competencies and allowed for the development of locally relevant programmes. It was also found that while most countries recognized the importance of functionality, functional messages were not always of direct or immediate relevance to the participants.

There is no implication here that governments should control all adult literacy programmes. The many nongovernmental organizations which engage in literacy work need to be supported, encouraged and their work coordinated.

Continuing education is relatively new and in most of the countries of the region there is no systematic provision. Effective post-literacy programmes have not yet been planned in many countries at the national level for continuity of learning of the neo-literates or primary school graduates and dropouts. The non formal education programmes, in most cases, are not planned with long-term goals and nor are they delivered as part of a full system of education. The graduates from these programmes do not have easy access to the formal system of education (due to absence of equivalency system), nor can they go ahead with life-long learning for further improvement of their knowledge and skills (due to absence of systematic continuing education programmes).

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[11] Sakya, T.M. & Meyer, G.R. op. cit.

Poverty characteristics, causes and empowerment of the poor – country perceptions

While there are many studies of basic education in the region, there have been relatively few which studied basic education from the perspective of its contribution to poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor. The Asia and Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) launched a study of basic education in selected countries to review literacy and basic education programmes in operation, with specific reference to the extent to and the manner in which they address poverty eradication and quality of life issues. The list of country studies is given in the references.

The *characteristics* of the poor identified by the countries are very much the *same as given earlier.* It is not the case that all the characteristics mentioned are present in any particular country or countries. But when the poor in all the countries are concerned they exhibit these characteristics. In some countries some characteristics may be more prominent than others.

a) Causes of poverty

The country studies also throw light on causes of poverty. The studies also recognize that it is very difficult where poverty is concerned to separate cause and effect. Taking the countries as a whole the following inter-related causes have been identified from primarily an educational perspective.

Isolation

This refers to isolation both geographically and intellectually. In the Asian region poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon. People living in remote rural areas, mountainous and arid regions are not only isolated from each other but also from the general population. Lack of good roads prevents them from having access to public services such as health, education and extension services. It also effectively prevents them from access to markets for their produce, access to purchase what they need and access to alternative sources of employment. It increases the cost in terms of both time and money in any interaction with others. It also severely inhibits access to anything new. Even within their own areas it retards social intercourse.

Accompanying this spatial isolation is the intellectual isolation arising from illiteracy and a low level of education. Communication being restricted to the verbal, the opportunities for gathering information are very restricted. They are deprived of basic information regarding such essential aspects as health, nutrition and information needed for their economic activities such as what to do in case of diseases, pests, drought, alternative crops to grow, preservation of agricultural produce, market information, etc. Even where there is access to electronic media, there may not be programmes designed for these people. Generally the electronic media are more likely to serve the "not-poor".

Being a minority group results in perhaps the most severe form of isolation. In some of the countries, the minority ethnic groups live in relatively remote parts of the country. Their language is different from that of the majority which results in a further isolation. In some other countries the minority groups are socially ostracized and physically separated into definite areas. Poverty is most severe among such minority groups.

Inadequate productive resources for income generation

The lack of land, labour, capital and credit are a major cause of poverty. Where they have access to land, they either do not own it, it is of poor quality, it is relatively small, likely to be eroded and without access to adequate water for cultivation. They may also not have good quality planting material. Isolation and ill health reduce the availability of labour. The labour is also mostly unskilled. They lack technical skills. They have practically no savings. If at all credit is available it is at exploitative rates of interest.

The pressure on land has resulted in the poor being shifted from land they have traditionally used or they no longer have access to the relatively large areas needed to practice the traditional agriculture. Where fishing is concerned, the fish stocks to which the poor have access have diminished. Development projects such as for irrigation and hydro power have displaced the poor from their traditional habitat into inhospitable environments where they do not have the knowledge and skills to make a living.

Inability to cope with risks

Life is full of risks whether one is rich or poor. The poor being unable to cope with risks become poorer. Risks arise from ill health and sickness in the family; accidents; failure of crops due to droughts, pests, diseases, etc.; fluctuations in the price of agricultural produce, essential commodities for consumption; diseases of farm animals; insecurity of tenure; natural calamities such as floods, cyclones, earth quakes, etc.

The poor are unable to cope with such risks. If the breadwinner is ill or otherwise incapacitated, the family becomes destitute. If the crop fails there is no insurance cover. If the price falls they have no option but to sell at whatever price which prevails. They have no capacity to store the produce or preserve it in some form. If the price of essential commodities rise the only option is to consume less.

Inadequate participation in development

The poor are rarely involved in making decisions which affect their lives. There are programmes which are specifically designed for them such as literacy and continuing education programmes, extension programmes, family planning and nutrition and health programmes, credit and savings programmes, etc. But they are rarely involved in their design and implementation.

At another level, they are not even aware of policies, programmes and projects which affect them. Large scale development projects which displace them from their habitats take them by surprise. They are aware of environmental protection laws only when they are prosecuted for breaking them. They have little say in local affairs.

They are not aware of their rights and also obligations as citizens. They may not feel free at all and take it as part of their conditions of life that they are treated virtually as slaves.

Lack of confidence in themselves

On account of their low educational level, with many of them being illiterate, their lack of resources and marketable skills, their low living standards, lack of organized efforts, paucity of institutional support, the poor tend to have little confidence in themselves to make a sustained effort to overcome their condition. They have no tomorrow to look forward to with confidence.

b) Empowerment of the poor

While empowerment of the poor as such has not been specifically dealt with in the studies, the meaning attached to empowerment of the poor may be inferred from the references to it both directly and indirectly.

One feature common to all the studies is the assertion that the poor should be actively involved in their own development. The programmes, projects and activities which are meant for the poor should be designed and implemented with their participation. The participation involves decision-making at all stages from planning, implementing and monitoring. It is only then that their potential could be fully utilised to solve their problems. The active involvement of the poor is regarded as a fundamental strategy.

The studies also referred to the following aspects. Empowerment also implies the ability to take collective action. The poor are to be encouraged to organize themselves for effective action. Local authorities are to encourage the formation of community groups to plan, implement, monitor poverty alleviation projects. The development of such organizational strength is to be supported by appropriate legal measures such as equitable land-laws, forest-laws, social legislation for protecting the weaker sections of society and in general a reform of the judicial system to enable the aggrieved to have easy access to legal remedies.

A pre-requisite for empowerment is the acquisition of the needed knowledge, skills and attitudes. Attitudes are important. The poor should have confidence in themselves and believe in their own ability to solve their problems and improve their conditions of life. The literacy and numeracy skills they acquire should be for such purposes.

In summary it may be said that the studies recognize the following as essential components of the empowerment of the poor:

- ☐ the power to take decisions on matters which affect them;
- ☐ the power to take collective, organized action for their development;
- ☐ the knowledge and skills to exercise the aforesaid powers; and
- ☐ the attitude that they can and should take action to better their condition.

Basic education and poverty eradication

As mentioned earlier, the study carried out in selected countries had as one of its purposes an examination of basic education from the perspective of poverty eradication. What follows is a synthesis of their perceptions.

a) Perception of basic education in relation to poverty eradication

Basic education constituted as at present is not specifically designed to alleviate poverty. Objectives relevant to poverty alleviation are not addressed. Where literacy programmes are concerned, the curriculum does not focus on literacy for a particular purpose and hence such programmes have little impact on the target groups. Learning sequences are not organized around life concerns of the poor. Curriculum transactions are woefully inadequate for skill development. Contents such as children's rights, women's rights and human rights which may be expected with a concern for the poor are rarely found.

The necessity to include work skills into basic education is emphasized. While the production skills of the rural population as a whole have to be modernised it is also essential to pay special attention to re-skilling rural women and girls. The work skills should lead to income generation. All this should occur within the broader context of national development, the development of the community in which the individuals live and be fully relevant to individual needs. This emphasis is in relation to literacy, post-literacy and continuing education programmes.

It is generally agreed that basic education programmes should be linked to the country's development programmes, should be continuous and lifelong and should be "owned" by the poor. Linking with development programmes provides a motive for the poor to participate in basic education. Poverty alleviation being a task for the whole society, there is the need to ensure that services for the poor at least converge if they could not be integrated.

Basic education programmes should be specific to the particular groups concerned. While there may be a common core, provision should be there for local variation. "Ownership" by the poor implies a greater degree of control over basic education programmes at the local level.

Where the formal primary is concerned the position may be summarised by saying that content relevant to poverty is present in the curriculum in many countries but it is mostly as items of information and knowledge to be acquired. There is no action outside the schools in relation to such content. The present formal school system has certain undesirable features such as being 'elitist' and not catering to the poor and the disadvantaged. Also the mastery of literacy and numeracy by those who leave the primary school may not be adequate. Children who do not master such skills are at considerable risk of emerging as the adult poor. Suggestions have been made that the curriculum should include work skills. Even where the curriculum includes such work experiences the attitudes of the teachers are not conducive to attaining the intended objectives. This is a significant observation indicating the need to get the commitment of the teachers in any intervention programme to assist the poor.

In improving the quality of the primary schools, the studies call for a greater participation of the community and the parents in particular. There are factors which inhibit such participation such as a feeling of inadequacy on the part of the parents themselves, lack of encouragement of such participation by the educational authorities and a tendency to believe that it is not their business to do so.

The perception of the countries may be summarised by saying that basic education programmes are not specifically designed to alleviate poverty though some of them, largely the non formal programmes, contribute to personal competency development, social development and have some impact on economic development.

b) Some promising practices

The studies also reported some promising practices which are briefly described below. China reports the work of several schools which holds much promise for getting schools engaged in poverty eradication activities as part of regular school work. There are instances of local schools which, "have expanded into community education and have become centres for training in agriculture. Useful information and practical skill training are provided in the school. Schools organized practical training courses and compiled materials on scientific techniques which were used in literacy classes. The literacy classes were also conducted in the schools which were kept open for such work in evenings and on holidays. In some villages the schools engaged in repairing lavatories, improving the water supplies, improving kitchens to save fuel. They also became entertainment centres for young people. The communities in turn have supported the schools which have improved." An example of a school which started literacy classes for the community combined with training in technical skills is also given. Yet another school had started literacy classes for their parents with the support of local personalities.

The Pacific Island Countries' study emphasizes the need to improve the formal primary to prevent the children from becoming the future poor. The study suggests three intervention strategies as having considerable potential, particularly since they entail little or no immediate expenditure. The strategies are as follow:

> *increased involvement of the community and especially of parents* in the day-to-day work of their children in school-based literacy and numeracy instruction;

increased use of classroom assessment (including classroom diagnostic testing and targeted summative evaluation of literacy achievement levels) and especially *monitoring* of individual progress; and

increased provision of books and especially vernacular and English language readers.

Where non formal primary education is concerned not much information is available from the study. In Vietnam the non formal alternative schooling provides a 100 week course for older children and disadvantaged children. The course includes a local component to teach physical education, painting and work education or local handicraft. Children receive a vocational training. "Many of them become tailors, dress makers, barbers, baby sitters, shoe cleaning boys, street vendors, etc."

There are literacy programmes which have attempted to combine literacy with developing skills needed for specific income-generation activities. The 24-month programe for illiterate women being conducted in Bangladesh by the Dhaka Asahania Mission is one such example. The skills being taught are specific to each participant. China reports literacy classes which also develop technical skills, some of them being, "scientific planting, ground film covering, scientific feeding, agriculture product processing and medical materials planting." India also states that, "At the post-literacy stage, continuing education programmes include income-generation skills, participation in community development and citizenship skills based on socio-political awareness." In the Philippines the communities are involved in the planning and implementation of the programmes.

India also reports several instances where more power and initiative at the local level have led to very significant improvements in the lives of the communities concerned. Under their Gram Panchayat, "the village of Chandoli eradicated drunkenness, improved their water supply, cultivated more land, got better crops, planted trees on arid land, made compost for local use as well as for sale." Women played a significant role in that effort. Another instance is of Naigaon village, a drought prone area, where the efforts of a local engineer has resulted in the community having enough water. A significant aspect of this scheme is the involvement of school children in "all aspects of the scheme". Another instance is of particular significance since it reports of the collective efforts of sensitive government officials along with the community. It has enabled Mandarnay village "to alleviate their poverty to a great extent. They have engaged in large-scale tree planting thus not only protecting their water supply but also getting produce from fruit trees, fodder for animals which had a ready market. They also learnt to construct small dams and use drip-irrigation and organic fertiliser. Their incomes have increased. A new school building has been constructed and also a community centre. School children are running a plant nursery the income from which is used to improve the school. A Play-centre has been established which takes care of the nutrition of preschool children and mothers."

In Indonesia, the literacy programme is followed by an Income Generation Programme. Among the programme inputs are "the training of the learners in "entrepreneurial development covering enterprise skills, book keeping skills, marketing skills and money saving skills"; providing the group with a fund and guiding and monitoring the group."

Malaysia does not have a problem of absolute poverty. It reports, "an almost limitless number of educational channels for the people to acquire knowledge, skills and values needed for better and sustainable living".

Nepal has developed a literacy curriculum paying attention to poverty alleviation but its problems are the lack of personnel and other resources to implement it particularly in the rural areas. It also refers to the, "the lack of infrastructure to implement the ideas and skills acquired by the people."

Both Thailand and the Philippines report on the involvement of the communities concerned in the design and implementation of the programmes. The Thai report states that in their Strengthening of Non Formal Occupational Training for Rural Employment (NORE) Project, the "key strategy was to involve the people and the local leaders in all activities of the project including decision-making." They state that their project had an unintended outcome. "Although the project did not intend to empower the people, the opportunity to discuss about their situations can lead to political impact if they are treated unfairly. Had the project been designed to empower the village people, the impact on personal and community development could have been considerably significant".

c) Potential of literacy and basic education for contributing to poverty alleviation

At national policy levels, there is explicit reference to the need for alleviating poverty. Alleviation of poverty has a high priority in many countries. In all countries programmes for the alleviation of poverty invariably include an educational component. But all are of the view that a purely educational intervention is not adequate. A multi-sectoral approach is considered essential. No policy statements have been cited which indicate that literacy and basic education have a significant role in the alleviation of poverty.

However, all countries emphasize the very significant contribution which literacy and basic education can play in poverty alleviation and development in general. The need to re-think and re-formulate literacy and basic education is also mentioned.

With regard to literacy it is acknowledged that mere reading, writing and numeracy are no longer adequate. This applies to both literacy acquired through the formal primary as well as through non formal modes. Basic education should result in the development of a better understanding of themselves and of the society in which they live; assist them to master the practical technology and the skills and attitudes needed to improve their quality of life and enable them to enhance their dignity as individuals.

Poverty alleviation programmes per se, without such support from basic education may be no more effective than basic education programmes alone. There has to be strong links between the two. The particular contribution of literacy and basic education to poverty alleviation may be inferred from the new thinking about them to be as follows:

- ☐ Empowering the people with desirable knowledge, skills, attitudes/values.

- Developing the self-confidence of the poor.
- Developing an attitude of openness, equality and reason towards a changing world.
- Developing an understanding of education as a continuing process, which is a prerequisite for development.
- Enhancing human capabilities.
- Developing vocational skills.
- Enhancing community participation in planning and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes.

In nearly all the countries the educational component relevant to poverty alleviation is mainly literacy, post-literacy and continuing education delivered via a non formal mode. While there is a belief in the potential of the formal primary education to contribute to poverty alleviation, as at present, the formal primary education is not regarded as making any significant contribution in situations where specific poverty alleviation programmes have become a necessity. The system is regarded as being very conservative and resistant to change. Also the sheer magnitude of the poverty as for example high child malnutrition makes it difficult for the conventional primary schools to make a significant contribution to improve the situation.

In summary it may be said that all the countries conceive of a very positive role for literacy and basic education for poverty alleviation via non formal modes.

Implications for action

The country studies on basic education and poverty also throw light on what is happening in the countries and what were felt to be possible future developments. Some are well known, like the need to focus on disadvantaged groups, women and girls, ethnic minorities and others like re-training of staff, revising the curriculum and are therefore not elaborated further. What follows are some relatively new implications for action.

a) Develop values/attitudes and skills besides those relating to literacy and numeracy

An essential change about which all are agreed is that literacy and numeracy skills alone are quite inadequate and should be accompanied by the acquisition of certain attitudes and knowledge and skills relating not only to vocations and income-generation but also to management and social, political and cultural life. This conception is more than what is implied by functional literacy which countries have been implementing. Functional literacy puts the emphasis on the acquisition of primarily economically and socially useful skills. The need to develop attitudes and values was not at the forefront.

It is felt that attitudes and values are important and critical to the poor in their attempts to better their condition. Even the attempt may not be made without some conviction of their inherent worth and ability and potential. They need to understand their situation and be convinced that it could be changed for the better. They need to be self-dependent and not other-dependent. The teaching/learning approach should support the development of these desirable values and attitudes. "Since the poverty groups tend to be less confident in their abilities and less expressive, the learning approach should encourage them to express their point of view in a mutual atmosphere so that they can be gradually more expressive. No matter how poor they are, they should also be treated with respect to self-dignity". (Thailand, p. 38) Values and attitudes need to be supported with thinking and analytical skills.

The emphasis on the practical skills and not just mere knowledge is from the perspective that the poor may take some meaningful action immediately, under their present conditions without waiting for the day when the situation is expected to improve. If their soil is poor what may be done immediately about it? What other crops may be grown? Such questions as they have not only need answers but the development of the necessary skills along with the supply of other resources which may be needed.

Among the attitudes and skills which need to be further supported, developed and refined (the poor already have them), are those relating to cooperative action. Even from a narrow economic perspective, collective savings would give the poor some economic power. But collective action may not be only for such purpose. Improving housing, sanitation, water supply,.. are possible through collective action if sufficiently motivated and certain minimum resources made available.

Management and entrepreneurial skills also need to be developed. This is particularly important if the poor are to take the initiative. Decisions need to be taken and implemented. Organized action is necessary. Plans have to be made. People not only need information but also the skill of seeking information and using information.

b) Organize the poor

Developing knowledge, skills and attitudes alone is not enough. Action has to be taken to organize the poor. Literacy and basic education programmes should have as an objective the organization of the poor not just into learning groups but also as action groups in other sectors. If income-generation skills are taught there may be merit in a group effort for various purposes such as purchase of raw material, production and marketing. If the learners as a whole have a problem relating to drinking water, group action may lead to some improvement of the current situation. There are many possibilities for collective action in relation to poverty alleviation even in situations where there is considerable illiteracy. Developing their organizational strength is part of the process of empowering the poor.

c) Provide local interventions specific to the different poverty groups

The characteristics of different groups vary a great deal. While there may be common elements or a common core in a programme, there should be a local component relevant to the specific group participating. Such a local component may, for example, emphasize practical skills useful in that particular environment. Local expertise and other local resources may be used. This implies developing the capacity of local staff to develop and implement such programmes.

There is also the need to recognise and give credit to local knowledge and expertise of the participants themselves. This is part of the process of developing a sense of their own worth and contributing to the development of values and attitudes.

d) Link literacy and basic education programmes to other development programmes

It is keenly felt that a purely educational effort will have little impact on poverty. The educational effort has to be supported by other sectors. Even if it is not feasible to integrate or coordinate the various inputs, it is suggested that the efforts should at the very least converge.

Such integration/coordination/convergence requires policy decisions at national levels and their vigorous and persistent follow-up at sub-national levels. At present few national policy statements explicitly recognise the possible contribution of literacy and basic education to poverty alleviation.

The development agenda should include the reduction if not the elimination of the physical isolation of the poor which has led to their inability to profit adequately from state services, made it difficult and costly to market their goods and services, kept them aloof from other communities, effectively prevented them from actively participating in the affairs of the country and in general has tended to keep them where they were both literally and metaphorically.

The development agenda may also include enabling legislation to facilitate the empowerment of the poor and remove obstacles to their advancement. A poor family gathering firewood from a forest reserve is often committing a crime for which they bear the full brunt of the law. The poor have been mobilised for forest conservation and re-forestation. Prisons are full of the poor who have been imprisoned because they were unable to pay the fines imposed for very minor offences. The state spends more on feeding them in the prisons. There are immediate measures which may be taken without much cost or opposition from vested interests.

e) Make the poor participate actively in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes

The need for the active participation of the poor in all aspects of a programme has been a constant refrain in the studies. Obviously this does not imply that the totality of the design, etc. is by the poor. The poor should be encouraged and allowed to take certain decisions. The poor need inputs from outside but they should be non-coercive and should be such as not to subjugate them further. On the contrary they should foster the emergence of the dormant strengths of the poor.

Participation should be facilitated by ensuring that there is access to programmes without any constraints. The very poor people should be reached, "by organizing educational activities in their community; the cost for participating in the program should be very low or there should be no cost at all; and the time to offer the program should not be in conflict with the occupation and life schedule of the people". (Thailand, p. 37)

Chapter 3

COMBATING POVERTY THROUGH BASIC EDUCATION – A PROGRAMME PERSPECTIVE

Preamble, purpose and scope

The poor and their problems have always remained high on the social agenda of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia-Pacific countries continue to lay great store, in their own ways, on basic education as a major strategy for national development. Apart from the several multi-sectoral poverty alleviation schemes and programmes the poor are kept at the centre in policies and programmes relating to basic education also. Universalization of primary education and eradication of adult illiteracy are accepted as tasks of the highest national priority. Pursuit of this goal has inspired a variety of incentive schemes to motivate children, youth and adult illiterates to enrol in schools, literacy classes and non formal learning centres. Also, more direct attempts have been made to meet the basic needs of the poor like providing early child care and nutrition support to primary school children and compensating parents for the opportunity costs. Further, attention is focused on mobilizing and organizing the people through environment building, mass campaigns and other strategies.

Commendable as these grand efforts are, it is ultimately on the question – does education make a change in one's life for the better? – that the success of all basic education efforts hinges. And this is the question that concerns the relevance of education and, in the case of the large multitude of the poor, its poverty. It is only when basic education is directed towards elimination of poverty that it can make any sense to the people and especially the poor. It is in this context that extant basic education policies and programmes need to be critically looked into from the point of view of empowerment of the poor (see Table 1). The crucial questions to be considered in this context are: What kind of basic education organized in what manner and employing what kinds of processes and pedagogies is most effective in triggering the release of the creative energies of the poor to grapple with the problems of poverty? What is the further value addition required for current basic education programmes in order that they become the cutting edge for dealing with poverty and quality of life problems?

A lesson that has forcefully been driven home during the past decades of efforts is that basic education can function as an empowering force only when it is clearly focused on issues that are directly concerned with improving the life of the people. It is also clear from the analysis of the country experiences that to effectively attack poverty and its syndromes, basic education should:

- be considered not in isolation but as an integral aspect of overall community development.
- be built around productive work and income generation activities involving skill training, credit, cooperatives and savings.
- give special thrust to the organization of the poor and building of positive attitudes and values like self-confidence and cooperation in them.

Table 1. Appraising the sensitivity of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor

1. Development context and status of basic education

What importance is attached and what role is assigned to basic education in poverty eradication and development policies/strategies?

What links exist between basic education and other development sectors? How is collaborative and cooperative functioning of all development departments including basic education towards poverty eradication ensured?

2. Access to poor and their participation

Is basic education easily available to all poor people? How is women's participation ensured? What is the quality of facilities available?

3. Relevance of programme contents

Do the poor see the point and purpose of basic education? Does basic education address the real life needs of the poor? Does it deal with developmental problems of the people directly?

What is the focus of activities in literacy training?

What is the extent and quality of provision made for employment and income generation activities and skill training? How are the poor trained to make use of credit, savings and cooperatives?

What is being done to improve the quality of life of the poor with reference to use of environmental resources for sustainable development, health and nutrition, family welfare and other basic services of agriculture, water, sanitation? How is the understanding of the world around developed?

How are the poor made to develop self-confidence and overcome fatalism, superstition and apathy? How are they made aware about their rights and freedoms? How are they helped to organize themselves and assert their rights? How are they prepared to take cooperative and constructive action to fight oppression?

4. Formal primary schooling

What is the orientation of primary education content and process *vis-a-vis* empowerment of the poor? What is the extent and depth in which the poverty concerns figure in the curriculum? How do the primary schooling processes accommodate the special learning needs of poverty groups?

Table 1. Appraising the sensitivity of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor *(continued)*

5. *Empowering women*

Is gender dimension of poverty addressed as a special problem? How is it addressed? What provisions are made to make women socially and economically self-reliant?

6. *Methods and materials*

Are basic education programmes located in the social context? Do the social, political, economic and cultural problems of the people inform and shape the content and processes of basic education? How is local technology and community knowledge made use of in the content and processes of basic education?

What is the place assigned to productive work in basic education?

How is the learner's involvement and participation in the learning process ensured?

What actions are taken to make the school an instrument of community empowerment? What in-community actions are taken by teachers and learners towards community empowerment? Do they cooperatively and collectively deal with common community problems? How is the learning content in basic services used in teaching?

How are the learning materials designed? What is their special feature vis-à-vis empowerment learning? How are the local learning resources identified and used?

7. *Early child development support*

What supports are provided to the child to shield it from poverty consequences? What kinds of provisions are made for early child care and education? How do they address the special needs of children from poverty groups?

8. *Planning and Management*

How are the poor empowered to manage their own basic education? How is the involvement of the community ensured in the planning of basic education? How effectively is authority decentralized and power given to local institutions?

Table 1. Appraising the sensitivity of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor *(continued)*

9. Responding to changes, innovations

How have basic education content and processes responded to increased application of science and technology and micro and macro economic changes with reference to occupational patterns, productive processes and job market?

What new interventions, approaches are tried out to give a sharper edge to basic education to combat poverty?

10. Preparing teachers and learning mediators

How are front-line workers trained to function as effective development agents? On what specific aspects of their role does the training focus?

These are by no means new discoveries. They are reiterations of decades of experiences in the field. Building on this received wisdom, in this chapter, the central concern will be with how basic education in its different forms can be directed towards eradication of poverty and empowerment of the poor. As the vista of various possibilities in this regard are explored, both general principles and strategies as well as interventions into specific programme components – content, methodology, materials and evaluation will be examined. This will be followed by an analysis of issues related to teacher orientation and presentation of illustrative frameworks for directing the thrust of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor in respect of formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training and continuing education. These frameworks present in a matrix arrangement programme features, clientele characteristics, their poverty profile, implied learning needs and possible programme interventions.

'Basic education' as used in this discussion covers three main categories of programmes – formal primary schooling, literacy training and continuing education and non formal education following the classification adopted by APPEAL. However, in actual practice, these classifications especially non formal and adult education are interpreted differently in different country contexts leading to a bewildering array of

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programme nomenclatures and titles. The three fold classification adopted here is based on the rationale that it addresses, respectively, primary school age children who are going to school, children who should be in schools but who are not due to socio-economic compulsions and illiterate or semi-literate adults needing literacy training and continuing education support.

General Strategies

Attacking poverty at the roots: early child development

It is fairly obvious that if poverty is to be fought effectively one must begin the 'war' in early childhood and even before. During the formative years of early childhood the social, cultural and economic implications of poverty act cumulatively to establish powerful obstacles to the total development of children. The damages that poverty can cause to the normal, healthy growth of the child can have a lasting effect on its personality and may be irreversible in later years. It is too well known that the early years of the child are critical from the point of view of the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. Further, the nature of the learning tasks at the primary school and the yardstick with which school success is measured make early intervention in favour of the poor an imperative. Research studies point to the beneficial effects of pre-school and parental education, home stimulation and health and nutritional support especially on child's language, intellectual development and 'teachability'.

Both on grounds of human rights and on pragmatic considerations, interventions in favour of the child are, therefore, essential to protect it from sickness, ill health and malnutrition and put it on the road to normal, healthy development. Happily there is a global awakening on the crucial need of helping children from poverty sections with respect to their basic needs of food, shelter and security and love. In the countries of the Asia-Pacific region pre-school programmes of various kinds are being implemented although they do not receive the same degree of support as other educational programmes catering to the school-going age group and beyond. Some countries have even proposed that child development be adopted as the focus for rural development and poverty alleviation. The awareness that the child can break the vicious circle of poverty, they believe, will spur the illiterate and poor parents into action to improve the economic and health situation of the family for the sake of the child. Brain development among children before age 7 is suggested as a strategy for illiteracy and poverty eradication and programmes covering pre-natal (in-utero), nursery, kindergarten stages and parenting are recommended.

Looking at early child development as a poverty eradication strategy one may identify the following areas in which interventions already on the way need to be further strengthened.

1. There is growing research evidence on the effects of poor health, sickness and malnutrition on the child in terms of low growth and low intellectual capacity which adversely affect the child's personality and social behaviour.[1] Health and nutrition support component of the basic services package needs to be implemented with even greater force than now.
2. Children from poverty groups, in most cases, need a home, custodial care, security, love and affection. Again, the global conscience has been awakened to this problem but existing efforts to cater to the emotional needs of children are too few to cover even a part of the children from poverty populations.
3. Lack of early stimulation during childhood comes in the way of children benefiting from basic education at the first level of schooling. This calls for provision of early childhood education (ECE) support in a big way. There are already several models of ECE in operation although their reach as far as children from poverty groups are concerned is severely limited. ECE should be so conceived and implemented as to effectively address the physical, cognitive and

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[1] See in this connection Myers, Robert, *The Twelve who survive.*

affective needs of the growing child and lay a solid foundation for later basic education.

4. The typical rural disadvantaged child comes from a home with very poor verbal climate and cognitive stimulation due, mainly, to the very low female literacy rate. Since school work in later years becomes academic involving abstract, symbolic and conceptual thinking, pre-school intervention should especially focus on language and cognitive development through play and self activity of the child.

5. Linked to the above is the finding that early child care and education can provide a strong support to basic education during later years. It should therefore be treated as an integral component of the total basic education package. While this has been accepted in principle, in actual practice child focused educational and other developmental services as would integrate the growing child with its basic education may not still be available to all poor children, especially those who live in remote areas.

6. Although poverty affects all, it affects children in a way that could be devastating. This aspect of poverty should be explained to parents and awareness generated in the community about treating children in a very special way with respect to meeting their basic needs of health, food, security, love and affection. Apart from using available basic services, community should plan and implement its own actions to meet the needs of children.

7. Parents and community should be given proper education in parenting and child rearing practices. This could be done by the school teachers/literacy training workers in collaboration with the officials in charge of implementation of concerned basic services.

Making primary education the cutting edge

Formal primary schooling, a predominantly a government sector operation, is the main delivery channel for the basic education of children in all countries. Being both a basic human right as well as an instrument of development it is made available to all children free and enforced through constitutional and legal enactments. Primary schooling is also for most children the only opportunity of formal education as most who complete it opt to enter the world of work. In view of its sweep and reach formal primary education possesses tremendous potential to serve as an instrument for empowerment of the poor. But the question is how well do the policies and practices of primary schooling in actuality reflect its strategic significance in poverty eradication.

Basic education, of which primary school is the main vehicle, is education that caters to the most general, universal learning needs of all. These needs, to repeat, "comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning." *Primary education can function as a liberating force and an instrument of development only to the extent that it actually caters to the basic learning needs as described above in letter and spirit.* Unfortunately, lack of relevance and poor quality plague primary education practically in all countries of the region. It is a matter of serious concern that while an attempt is made to relate education to life in adult and non formal education programmes such attempts to "life orient" primary education are either lacking or are thwarted. It is in the sphere of formal primary schooling that reform and reorientation are called for as a matter of utmost urgency if basic education is to function as an instrument of empowerment.

Presently, the stress in UPE has been on widening access, improving facilities and increasing enrolment and retention. Although the substantive concerns of primary education have come under increasing attention during recent times these have been mostly centred around questions like: why do so many children fail? why are their learning attainments so low? how can they be increased? But the question that should torment one even more is whether children who have passed and registered higher scores of achievement have at all been benefited by their 'education'? whether higher achievement has made a difference in their lives for the better and has empowered them to deal with their critical life needs? Unfortunately, there have been no serious concerns expressed as such about what children learn and what they do not, whether they find whatever they learn relevant to their needs and interests and whether the school learning empowers them and the community to better their living conditions. This is a far cry from the vision of a basic education that seeks eradication of poverty and empowerment of the poor.

A highly disturbing aspect of this situation is the subsidiary role which primary schooling has come to play, as a stepping-stone for higher stages of education instead of functioning as a self-contained and self-sufficient experience designed to fulfil the basic learning needs of all. Its most pernicious effect can be seen in the domination of academic learning on practically the entire content and processes of primary education – goals, curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation. Although curricular provision is made here and there to address the special needs of poverty groups (as for e.g., projects in Work Education and Home Economics in Philippines), in actual curriculum transaction the poverty objective is not really addressed. Teaching and learning are completely decontextualized in a typical primary school, urban or rural, with children being "taught" by teachers to pass examinations. The empowerment skills and learning tools which the poor need to be armed with and the attitudes, values and qualities of mind which they need to develop – ability to question, choose, decide, inquire, create, take constructive action – do not count for much under the dispensation of such an examination ruled system. This is no basic education. It does no good either to the individual or to the society.

The phenomenon of education at higher levels dictating terms to education at the lower stages has been referred to as the "cannibalistic" tendency of education.[2] Its worst victims, of course, are the poor. While the education of each and everyone to the limit of their capacities is certainly a desirable social goal, in contexts where millions do not have access even to basic schooling, fulfilling the basic educational needs of all has to come first. In translating this philosophy into curricular action countries are experiencing stiff resistance from inegalitarian forces trying to subvert primary schooling as a training ground for elitist pursuits thereby distorting its very purposes and goals. In China concern is expressed that "even education at the primary level has also been adversely affected by the lopsided efforts directed towards higher level schooling unduly hampering the all round development and depriving them of a joyous and pleasant school life."[3] Similar forces are at work in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and in several other countries.

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[2] Pauvert, J.C., Quoted in *International Symposium and Round Table Proceedings*, Beijing, UNESCO, 1989.

To make primary education an empowering experience for the poor attention should forthwith be turned on its objectives, content and methods. If these do not adequately reflect what should be a central concern of basic education viz., empowerment of the poor, it is time to start reconstruction of the basic education edifice. In other words, formal primary schooling if it seeks empowerment of the poor, not just in intent but also in practice, should ensure that

- ☐ it declares in loud and clear terms its objective of empowerment and pursuit of all that it entails in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values which must be developed in the poor.
- ☐ its content (curriculum) is sensitive to poverty issues, specific to the learning needs of the poor and built around their basic life concerns. Moreover, non-exploitative, productive work involving skills training/retraining in the context of the opening job market will have a prominent place in the curriculum.
- ☐ it adopts a pro-active pedagogy that involves the learners in thinking, choosing, deciding, acting, inquiring and creating, arouses and awakens them about their condition

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[3] *Basic Education and National Development: Forty Years of Chinese Historical Experience*, Shanghai Institute of Human Resource Development, May 1991, p. 26.

and mobilizes them towards collective, cooperative, constructive action, to fight exploitation and secure justice.

- ☐ it pitches high on the development of positive attitudes and values, building of self-confidence and banishment of negative, fatalistic tendencies.

To conclude, primary education can mean a better life for the poor only when it emphatically declares its commitment for the poor, sincerely translates intent into action and does all this with full community support and participation. But this cannot happen unless it frees itself from the stranglehold of the demands of higher learning and functions as a self-contained and self-susaining experience for the learners.

Combating feminization of poverty

The Asia-Pacific region contains two thirds of the world's extremely poor and the greater number of them are women. The number of rural women living in poverty has risen over the last 20 years by about 50% compared to an increase of about 25% in the case of rural men. The proportion of female headed households is on the increase and tends to be concentrated among the poor. The growing feminization of poverty and its persistent and increasing burden on women are critical areas of concern in development and poverty eradication.

Women, by all counts, are the worst sufferers and victims of poverty. Gender discrimination in education, in social roles, occupational choice and in economic and other spheres of activity both accounts for and enhances the misery of their poverty. If poverty is to be eradicated it is imperative that the poverty eradication strategies adopt a bold gender perspective. Basic education in its war against poverty should target women and girls and address itself to the task of removal of gender discrimination. It should fight entrenched attitudes that account for the subjugation of women and clear the way for their real empowerment.

That there is a pronounced gender dimension to poverty is obvious. It is the women and girls especially those in rural areas that bear the brunt of poverty. They are all the time struggling with their farming tasks, tending cattle, goat, sheep, fetching water and fuel, doing wage labour, attending to cooking and household tasks, taking care of the aged and sick, looking after young children. It has been estimated that nearly 30% of the time of the rural girl child in India is spent in the collection of fuel and 20% in fetching water. In Nepal, the demand for girl labour is higher by about 50% compared to the boys. Vulnerability to child abuse especially the girl child is a critical issue at the root of poverty in countries like Vietnam and Thailand. In societies where there is an inherent gender discrimination economic restructuring adversely affects the women unless it is deliberately directed to protect their interests. Otherwise structural adjustment policies are likely to result in greater unemployment for women given the built-in gender discrimination in the labour market and adversely affect women's economic activities in the rural areas.

What accounts for the severity of poverty among women is the discrimination against women and girl children in almost all spheres of human activity. With reference to practically all indicators of human development – literacy, basic education, health and nutrition, mortality rates, economic status, social well being and sex ratio in many countries of the region women compare unfavourably with men. Participation of girls and women in education is low not because they chose to deprive themselves of schooling but because of pressure of work and the decision whether they should go to school is not women's but men's. Patriarchy and low status, prevailing cultural norms of gender behaviour and the perceived domestic and reproductive roles, the phenomenon of child labour especially among girls and absence of support services to release the girl child from household chores were identified as the main obstacles in the way of girls education by the SAARC conference on Women and Education.

Women's participation and performance in economic activity is not judged with the same standard as men's. Although laws exist with respect to equal opportunities for entering all types of careers and equal wages for equal work they are hardly ever implemented in full. Women suffer deprivation because of the traditional perception of activities and occupations as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. It is feared that when mechanization enters farming it is men and boys who appropriate the machine as a 'manly' act and women lose their participation opportunities outside the home and become more 'home bound'. Poor women spend most of their time keeping the house – cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, fetching water and fuel, looking after children and the elderly – and all this is not taken into account as productive work engaged in by women and goes without any reward.

Considering the nature of the problem, actions towards the eradication of female poverty should take into cognizance several pertinent issues like: role of government and the civil society, macro-economic framework and the market, empowerment mechanisms aimed at increasing income, employment and productivity of the poor, power structures controlling resource allocation, social safety nets and social protection for the vulnerable, survival strategies practised by the poor to cope with poverty, and of course, the role of basic education.

Attacking poverty among women through basic education essentially involves strategic actions from two angles. First, basic education should come in as a powerful and positive interventionist force in fighting the pervasive gender bias. Secondly, it should function as an instrument of women's empowerment by assisting women to achieve economic viability and organize themselves to fight the oppressive structures in the existing reality.

Discriminating practices have their roots in traditional perceptions of gender roles in society, wrong beliefs and negative attitudes about the personality make up of men and women. Awareness generation, consciousness raising, dispelling of wrong beliefs and overcoming of negative attitudes are some of the important objectives which basic education should pursue. Education should first free itself from gender bias. A wide range and variety of actions have been suggested to over come gender bias through education like increasing the visibility of women and projecting a positive image of their role in history and social life, rational discussion of outmoded gender related myths and traditions, elimination of negative stereotypes, undifferentiated curricula for boys and girls etc. These actions must be further strengthened and pursued with vigour.

Empowerment of poor women through basic education in the sense of making them socially and economically self-reliant essentially involves: equipping women with the basic learning tools, developing their productive capabilities and enhancing their overall capacity for full participation in all fields.

Literacy training for women, it has to be noted, should be conceived as empowering and not domesticating literacy. It should emphasise literacy and functional literacy skills that are integrated in programmes that conscientize women on gender and socio-economic issues. The training should aim at improving their mental abilities – to think logically, to solve problems, to raise questions. It should raise their consciousness about their rights, responsibilities, manifest and concealed causes of women's oppression and laws governing women's status.

As to enhancement of economic viability, it should be strongly emphasised that the focus should shift from considering women as passive recipients of social welfare to their social and economic development as autonomous persons. The programmes should not just be supply-oriented but aim at development of women as economic producers, as active participants with men in development. The programmes should aim at income generating skills without limiting them to feminine, traditional skills. Further they should go beyond skill training in the concerned vocation and also cover areas like obtaining credit, processing raw materials, organizing production, finding marketing outlets, farming cooperatives, introduction of time labour saving devices, sharing of household responsibilities between men and women and introduction of new and appropriate technology. Especially, in the context of modernization of production technologies and processes the requirements of rural women to enhance their productivity and become economically self-reliant need to be assessed afresh from the point of view of how well they can cope with the new demands as the skills they possess may be too traditional and economically not viable. Under this situation basic education should as a matter of priority rescue their skills from traditionalism. Retooling and re-skilling of rural women is a task of primary importance in alleviating the poverty of women.[4]

Even more important, education should come as an active interventionist force to help women to fight negative attitudes and values that keep them subjugated to passive and dependent roles and develop a constructive outlook on life and values like self-confidence and cooperation. It should focus on transforming women's consciousness and awakening them to their potential for themselves and their societies. They should be empowered to analyse their contexts, to organize and mobilize for social change, to develop autonomy in decision making and to build their overall capacity for full participation in all fields. When literacy learning, economic productivity and attitude formation are strengthened as above basic education will prove to be a real empowering experience for women.

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[4] Naik, Chitra, "The gender dimension in basic education for poverty alleviation".

Work orientation to basic education

Experiences in adult education and literacy training the world over have brought home the lesson time after time that literacy training on its own will carry no conviction whatsoever with the poor. "Rice and pigs are of primary importance beyond the fact of simply becoming literate."[5] In other words, what the poor need most is to become self-sufficient in meeting their basic needs and to improve their living conditions. They need solutions to problems like: What is to be done to make the rice plants stand erect without sagging? How is breakage of grain to be kept at the minimum while milling rice? How to deal with the problem of fall in the price of tomato?[6] Studies on basic education interventions on poverty have invariably drawn attention to the pivotal role accorded to the critical living needs of the poor centred around 'work' – how to increase productivity, how to earn more, how to get a job, how to enhance employability, how to respond to economic opportunities and so on – and the strategic importance of relating academic learning to work-related problems and experiences. Basic education should therefore get its sustenance from the culture of work in which the lives of the poor are deeply embedded.

Productive work as an organizing principle of curriculum adds to the value of basic education programmes in a number of ways. The most important of these, perhaps, is that it enhances the capacity for labour and productivity leading to greater chance of employability, income generation and income enhancement. It also helps the poor acquire skills related to resource generation, intelligent, sustainable and skilful use of environmental resources and knowledge and skills required for adoption of new production technologies and responding creatively to income earning opportunities. With reference to attitudes and values participation in productive work helps them to develop respect for work, dignity of labour, skills of working together and cooperative living.

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[5] Quoted from Doronila, Maria et.al *Learning from Life, Volume 2.*

[6] Questions raised in farmers' meetings organized by the Indian Institute of Education, Pune, India.

Work also acts as a powerful antidote to the narrow academic learning atmosphere that characterises most basic education settings and motivates the learners towards attainment of curricular objectives. Participation in productive work at the learning place establishes a continuity between the school (the learning setting) and the life outside and relates learning with life. Locating education in the world of work helps learners learn through practice and apply knowledge acquired in practical life situations. Intellectual productivity cannot thrive if work is separated from academic studies and *vice versa.* Work experience and academic learning mutually support each other and abundant evidence exists for this.

Unfortunately, work as a curricular objective in its own right or even as a pedagogic strategy is looked upon with suspicion by the poor themselves, in some contexts. In a social context where book learning is all that matters, the poor understandably look upon it as the only way out for their children to move out of poverty. They are, therefore, not inclined in favour of inputs like work experience which they regard as an attempt to keep the poor always poor. To them school learning and life outside are two independent realms and any attempts to bring the two closer may harm the life chances of their children. This learning – work dichotomy with its roots in the traditional equation of knowledge with book learning and the common man's perception of the role and functions of the school-constitutes a major hurdle in integrating work with education.

One of the factors that accounts for the disfavour with which work is looked upon by some may be the mechanical and non-creative manner in which work skills are taught. It is fairly obvious that unscientific, mechanical and unimaginative practice of work neither enhances productivity nor develops intellect. Problem solving, visible creation and socio-economic and cultural value of the product must become the chief aspects of work experience. Measures for sustenance of life, prevention of poverty and enhancing productivity should inform the choice and conduct of work experience. Work experience should never be treated as a mundane, utilitarian, lowly task needed for survival. It should take the form of conscientization with the learner going through the process of knowing, processing knowledge analytically, converting knowledge into decision for action and making the decision manifest in originality infused in the work process. We need such work education not only for poverty alleviation but for total socio-economic development of all the people. And this work education needs to be based on intellectual analysis and a critical consciousness of 'self' and 'society'.

Another explanation of the apathy towards work could be the traditionalism that characterises the school practices in work experience. Modern science and technology has great potential in helping people to meet their basic needs of life such as food, water, fuel, dwelling, implements and techniques for agriculture, craftsmanship and several other daily life concerns of the poor. Basic education can respond to this situation in two ways. It can, through its curriculum, explore possibilities of applying the science and technology inputs as would be of immediate benefit to the poor to sustainable rural and urban development. Secondly, it can stimulate an informed demand for technological interventions needed for application in the social sectors. Its content and practice could be so designed as to meet such an objective.[7] To conclude, development oriented and production based work experience as the major component of curriculum can bring out the creativity and inventiveness of the people and make basic education more purposive and enjoyable.

Building the school as an institution of community empowerment

Poverty hits not just individuals and families but wears down entire communities and populations. The war against poverty should therefore be launched by communities themselves unitedly and determinedly. For this wish to be realised in actual practice communities should be suitably empowered to fight ignorance, illiteracy, social exclusion, gender exploitation and defeatist outlook on life that leaves its members resigned to their fate. In promoting such community empowerment and organizing and mobilizing the community towards poverty eradication in-community activities of the school play an important role.

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[7] Naik, Chitra, "Basic Education and Poverty Alleviation".

In-community activities of the school

There are several activities which literacy workers and the school through its teachers and learners can take up towards alleviation of poverty in the community. While identifying these the entire spectrum of activities and processes that govern the life of the people in the community has to be considered – governance, production, distribution and marketing of goods, local technology, changes in occupational and employment patterns, basic services, social and cultural life. These activities may fall outside the technical domain of the curriculum but they will go far not only in providing direct succour to the needy but also in creating facilitating conditions in the school for relating curricular learning to the real life needs of the people. They will contribute in great measure to bring school learning nearer to life and reduce the cultural distance between the two, a prerequisite to attract people to basic education and make it life oriented. Cumulatively, they will establish the school as a community asset and an institution of empowerment. Illustrations of such activities are given below.

- Helping the poor understand the provisions of poverty alleviation schemes like public distribution systems, basic services and credit and ensuring that the benefits reach them.
- Helping the poor understand the various protections and safeguards given to them through social and economic legislations, for example, laws governing labour, land reforms, marriage, etc. and, in needy cases, guiding them through official and legal procedures to secure protection and redress.

- The school can act as a referral institution by establishing communication between the affected poor and the concerned development/administrative agency with respect to such problems as ill health and sickness, adopting new production techniques in agriculture, family planning, child health and nutrition, protection of crops etc.

- Teachers can act as the local guide and extension officer in helping the poor to make use of the various development schemes and basic services available. They can also mobilize the poor towards better implementation of the schemes and services, for example, removing hassles and procedural delays in procuring credit and government doles for the unemployed, aged and widows, food support under the public distribution system.

- In times of natural calamities like earthquakes, drought, famine and floods, teachers, students and the school can organize relief on their own (by collecting money, food, clothing, medicines) for the poor or join hands with other agencies in the organization and management of relief services.

- Teachers can visit the homes of the poor parents to monitor children's attendance and participation in the school curricular and cocurricular activities and also to take the parents into confidence in the education of the children. Apart from helping the teachers to understand the conditions under which the child has to learn such visits also indicate how teachers can help in improving the living conditions of the families.

- Schools can take up specific projects in health, sanitation, prevention of environmental degradation, drinking water supply, improvements in traditional technology (prevention of soil erosion, biogas, milling of grains, dehusking, brick making). Such projects, apart from being invaluable learning experiences for the children and elders involved, also lead to better and improved ways of doing things.

- Arousing the poor about their rights and freedoms can be one more important area of work for the teachers. This need not be carried out in a didactic manner but as a matter of practical necessity with reference to life problems as they arise in concrete contexts, for example, denial of right to admission in a school, denial of access to basic services etc. Human rights education is a matter of absolute necessity if poverty is to be fought collectively, cooperatively and constructively by the people as a whole. Teachers can also help in bringing specific instances of rights violations to the agency overseeing their implementation.

- A major obstacle to poverty eradication is the apathy, superstition, fatalism and despair that dictate and dominate the lives of the poor. Social activists working with the poor have adopted attitude building as one of their major planks of attack on poverty. Teachers can join such efforts or design their own projects and programmes to fight superstition and negative attitudes. They can demonstrate to the poor, for example, the falsity of certain traditional beliefs and customs that come in the way of adoption of good practices relating to health (beliefs about certain diseases), nutrition (change of food habits to meet new situations), child rearing (prejudices against the girl child), agriculture, social relationships (practice of discrimination) through practical examples and activities in a convincing manner. Teachers may also involve the poor in activities that build their confidence and increase their self-image.

- Yet another action area could be fighting the isolation, marginalization and discrimination of the poor. The causes of this poverty condition lie deep and their removal calls for long range social and political action. Teachers, in the meanwhile, can contribute their bit to fight these social evils. Some of the actions they can take may be: visiting the poor and identifying themselves with their sufferings, desires, aspirations, participating in their major life events – birth, death, marriage, festivals, fairs – as one of them, building bridges of communication between the poor and others.

- ☐ To generate confidence in their own abilities and to demonstrate that collective and cooperative action can accomplish many things schools may organize various kinds of projects. These could be construction projects like making a road, digging a well, building a shelter or service projects like getting the government to provide a health care facility, agricultural extension services, credit facilities, basic education services.

What is presented above is the range of possible actions which the school as an institution and teachers in their individual capacities or collectively can launch to establish the school as a community asset to which the poor can turn to in times of distress. The actual actions that a school will be able to take up in any given context however depends upon several factors: the poverty characteristics of the particular community, the efficiency with which the school is functioning, the motivation and idealism of the teachers, the dynamics of social life in the community and, most important of all, a facilitating political climate. *Actions involving empowerment of the poor by their very nature cannot be apolitical. As such a supportive political environment is very essential for the schools to take on this role.*

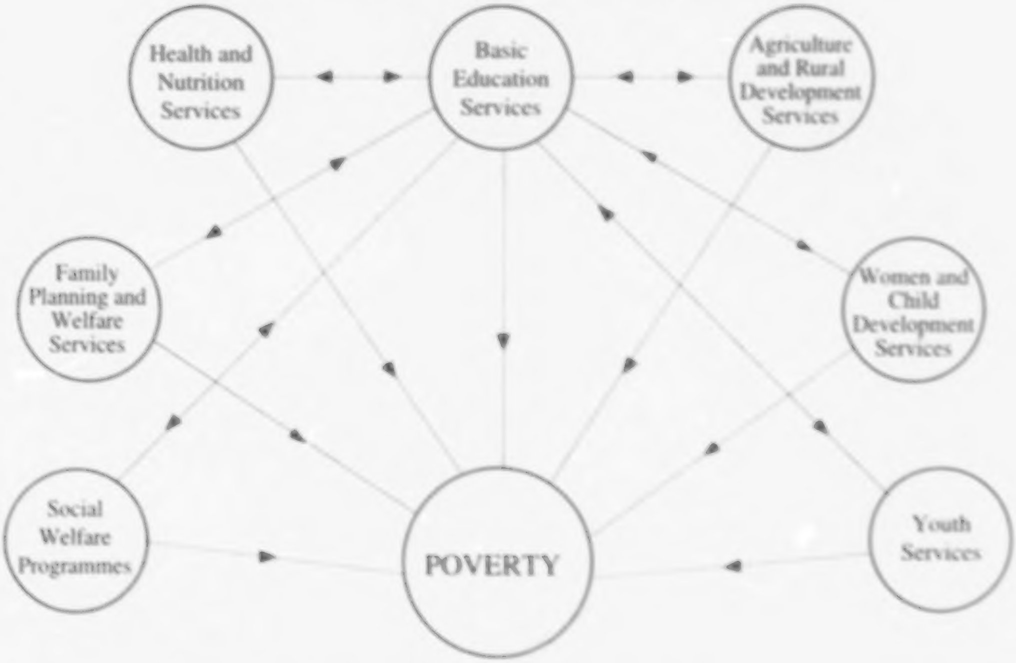
For the vision of school as an empowering institution to be realized it is necessary that the school be regarded as an asset of the community and developed as such. In most countries of the region, the rural primary school remains the one state institution closest to the community. However poor and ill equipped, it still constitutes a resource for the community. Keeping a long range view the schools can be so developed as to make them function as empowerment institutions.

Integrating basic services with basic education at the community level

It is generally accepted that basic services provided to give relief to the poor with respect to fulfilment of their basic living needs should be integrated with basic education which is also a part of the package of basic services (see diagram). The crucial question is what integration in operational terms means (there are degrees of integration and many levels at which services can be integrated) and what is to be done to ensure that the intended integration actually takes place at the ground level. The matter acquires greater seriousness in the context of directing the thrust of basic education towards poverty eradication. Possible lines of action in this regard may be:

I. The availability and implementation of basic services can be used as the rallying point to bring about awareness and awakening in the community about its developmental state and the need for people to organize themselves and work collectively in redressing their developmental problems.

Relationship of basic education with other basic services and their convergence towards poverty eradication


Health and Nutrition Services
Basic Education Services
Agriculture and Rural Development Services
Family Planning and Welfare Services
Women and Child Development Services
Social Welfare Programmes
POVERTY
Youth Services

Note: The diagram illustrates that basic education contributes to poverty eradication,

i) directly through development of basic and life empowering skills;

ii) indirectly through the educational and learning components in other basic services; and

iii) all basic services interactively with basic education converge on poverty eradication.

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Apart from creating demand for more and better services it would also provide an opportunity for building the right attitudes and values among the poor.

II. The village school could be a converging point for the delivery of basic services. Such an arrangement would integrate the school directly with the problems of the people and help the school on its way to becoming an empowering institution of the community. It will also unify children, parents, community and the teachers around the common goal of improving the life of the people.

III. The learning content in the basic services of health, food, nutrition, could be exploited to give point and purpose to literacy training, adult education and primary school learning. The possibilities in this regard are many. In fact the entire content of basic education can be built around the learning themes of the basic services thereby giving life-relevance to learning. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Learning content in Basic Services-Illustrations

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Basic awareness of facts, practices and rules of good health, common diseases, overcoming illness, cultivating good personal health habits, being aware about consequences of bad practices on general health of the community around, being aware of and effective utilization of health services available, generating demand for access to better health services, skills of healthful living, use of traditional medicines.

NUTRITION, FOOD

Basic awareness about balanced food and calorie intake. Learning to spend wisely on food, valuing nutritional value of food than traditional food habits, customs where they conflict with nutritional requirements, skill in preparing balanced diet, being aware of diseases caused by malnutrition and being able to take preventive care, being aware of and effective use of nutritional services available, demanding access to better nutritional support.

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Table 2. Learning content in Basic Services-Illustrations *(continued)*

FARMING

Being aware of modern techniques of farming, use of fertilizers to increase farm productivity and adopting new techniques, labour saving devices, utilizing opportunities to acquire and enhance productive skills, being aware of and effective use of basic services in agriculture, cooperative functioning towards more effective implementation of new techniques.

DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION

Being aware about the importance of clean, safe drinking water and water borne diseases, acquiring knowledge and skills of making water safe for drinking, keeping the sources of drinking water clean.

Being aware of the environmental hazards to community and personal hygiene of waste accumulation, scientific methods of waste disposal and waste recycling.

COOPERATIVES AND CREDIT

Being aware of what trade practices exist in the community and outside, learning to confidently participate in the trade and commerce of the community, allowing oneself not to be exploited by the middle men. Knowledge of money system, income generating/trade opportunities, enhancing productivity skills to earn and consume wisely, use of cooperatives and credit, cultvating savings habit.

FAMILY WELFARE AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Awareness about the consequences of large family size on quality of life aspects – health, nutrition, food and poverty. Gender equity, awareness and effective use of family planning and welfare services.

Being aware of how and who takes decisions on matters that affect the life of the community, civic and social awareness. Participating in decision making processes involving community life. Learning to live and work cooperatively. Knowledge and understanding of how others live, the dynamics of the community, interpersonal relations, understanding one's rights. Learning to exercise rights and freedoms.

Several development ministries and departments are involved in the task of poverty alleviation like health, family welfare, rural and tribal development, youth services, child welfare in addition to education. The characteristics and problems of the poor and their learning needs are diverse and cut across the wide range of development services and programmes. A synergistic alliance on the part of all who are concerned with development and their concerted and coordinated action is essential for the various development services to converge on poverty concerns. Adjustments and adaptations of basic education programmes to poverty eradication goals will yield the maximum benefits only when such a collaborative and cooperative developmental context is created.

Decentralized planning and management of basic education

For developmental efforts – educational and others – to bear fruit active participation of the people at the grass roots level is an absolute must. This no doubt is a truism. But it needs repetition here in the context of reorientation of basic education towards empowerment of the poor. Poverty eradication efforts should target communities/villages which are the smallest cohesive units of people living together. People at this level have a better perception of their problems and requirements. Mobilization of the poor and the involvement of the rural poor masses in taking decisions about the activities which affect their lives directly is better ensured at the level of local communities. All these point to the need for suitable decentralization of planning and management of developmental programmes including basic education. An example of a decentralized approach towards integration of basic education services at the community level around common poverty concerns is outlined below.

At the community level basic education is delivered through formal primary school and/or non formal primary education and literacy and adult education programmes. If these programmes are to effectively address eradication of poverty in the community, the needed educational interventions should be planned and executed with the active involvement and cooperation of the people of the community. A promising strategy in this regard is to bring community unity in its full strength to bear on the effective implementation of basic education services so that they converge on critical poverty concerns of the community. Under this plan, the different channels of basic education services in the community – literacy training, non formal education, primary schooling – will not function in an isolated manner but will be effectively coordinated and integrated to converge on the poverty problems of the community. The programmes will all have the same basic core contents (learning themes) and this core will be derived from the felt needs of the community. The community will be involved through out at all stages – needs identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – to build a sense of ownership of the programme. While the programmes will have a common core of learning contents, their transaction in actual learning situations will differ for different learner groups in accordance with their motivations and perceived needs. What will be common to all will be their simultaneous concern in their own way with the poverty problems of the entire community. Even more important there will be functional communicational channels and linkages between the three programmes to impart flexibility, facilitate mutual interactions and feed back. Such integration of basic education services around a common core of poverty concerns involves meticulous planning based on a thorough analysis of both the basic education and poverty situation in the community. (See box, pp. 82-83)

Participation and involvement of the community especially in trying out bold and innovative approaches like the one described above cannot obviously be procured without vesting the people with the required power and authority. In the absence of such devolution of power, resources and authority it will be plainly unrealistic to expect people to own the basic education programmes and use them in their own way to deal with their problems. Integration of basic services with basic education, in-community activities of school, building school as an institute of community empowerment, work orientation of basic education, strategic actions to deal with the poverty of women and the several other strategic interventions suggested for attacking poverty cannot be effectively implemented unless the community is suitably empowered to manage its own basic education.

Decentralization of educational planning and management down to the village/habitation level accompanied by devolution of authority, financial and executive powers is a line of action for educational reform

Integrating basic education services at the area (community) level – an outline of steps

1. Identify 'area'

'Area' could refer to poverty groups sharing common characteristics (rural landless farm labour, urban squatter settlement population) living in geographically contiguous areas. It has a spatial, demographic and cultural reference. Its size could be small (a small community of poor people living in a habitation, village or group of villages) or large groups of poverty populations spread over a much wider area.

2. Analyse the poverty situation of the area

Aspects that may be considered include: what are the characteristics of the poor? how are they manifested? why are they poor? Geographical, demographical, economic, social and cultural factors accounting for poverty – what are their occupations? earnings? income spending and consumption patterns? risks and hazards to which they are exposed? what is their health and nutritional status? position in the society? what infrastructure and basic services are available to them? how are the basic services used? what is the status of employment?

3. Identify specific living and learning needs of the poor which can be addressed through education

What specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and values do they need for their empowerment? what is the present level of awareness of the people about their condition? what is the status of illiteracy, primary school enrolment, participation and learning achievement? what is their present capacity for labour? what is the level of productive skills they possess? what kind of skill upgradation and new skills development are required? what is their level of self-esteem? how well are they organized and motivated to cooperatively deal with the poverty syndromes?

4. Appraise the basic education situation in the area

How well are the learning and living needs of the community provided for in the existing basic education programmes? what kinds of programmes are in operation and how effectively are they functioning? what objectives are being pursued in these programmes, through what kind of contents, what methodologies and with what results? how well are the needs integrated into the programme contents? do the children, youth and adults in the community find the basic educational programmes useful to them in addressing their life needs? Intensive, in-depth study of the programmes as they operate on the ground be conducted to generate useful qualitative data for planning interventions.

Integrating basic education services at the area (community) level – an outline of steps *(continued)*

5. Identify critical common core contents for reorientation of basic education programmes

The analysis of poverty conditions, the learning and living needs of the poor and the extent to which they are addressed through current basic education programmes for the children, youth and adults should illuminate common "life crisis" content themes which should form the nucleus of all basic education programmes – adult literacy, non formal education and formal primary schooling. These themes may relate to basic and life empowerment skills, quality of life enhancing experiences, awareness building activities and creative, productive use of labour capacity. The substantive, content aspects of these themes will however have to be worked out with specific reference to the poverty and educational contexts of the area.

6. Integrate the basic education services around the critical, core contents

This would mean that the different basic education programmes in operation in the area would all be built around the same common core and converge on the common objective of poverty eradication. However, the specific programme contents and learning sequences in the channels differ according to the motivations and learning needs of different learner groups.

7. Design appropriate learning sequences

Design appropriate learning sequences for the content themes for children in primary schools, youth in non formal learning arrangements and illiterate adults in literacy training as appropriate to their motivations and identified learning needs. The learning sequences may aim at sensitization and awareness generation, knowledge and understanding, building of attitudes and values, training of skills, awakening and conscientization and practical, constructive social action.

8. Redesign/adjust the delivery systems

Redesign/adjust the delivery systems to provide for inter-learning and free communication among and between the different learner groups and learning mediators (teachers).

that has already been accepted by most countries in principle. The progress as far as implementation is concerned is at various stages in the different countries. Decentralization acquires greater significance in the context of reorientation of basic education towards poverty eradication issues. As has already been discussed the task involves essentially decentralising the curriculum planning process in order to design and implement interventions that are particularly responsive to the living and learning needs of identified poverty groups. The power and authority to be given to the local communities to pursue such involvement and the different levels and kinds of people's participation needed are to be worked out with reference to specific country contexts.

Directing programme thrusts towards empowerment of the poor

Introduction

Building on the general principles and strategies of combating poverty through basic education, in this section, attention will be focused on how the thrust of basic education programmes can be directed towards empowerment of the poor. It is clear that any such endeavour involves consideration of a range of issues relating to the design, content and strategies of the programmes. Specifically, the orientation, goals and objectives, content, teaching-learning strategies, methods and materials and evaluation practices need to be looked into from the point of view of how they can be reshaped to reflect the empowerment objective. In the foregoing pages, these different aspects will be examined in detail to identify the needed interventions to reorient them towards empowerment learnings. This will be followed by presentation of illustrative programme frameworks in respect of formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training.

Basic premises

This endeavour of focusing basic education on empowerment of the poor through reorientation of programme contents and processes is based upon the following assumptions and premises.

1. Basic education programmes suitably reoriented can make definitive contributions towards empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty.

2. These contributions mainly relate to development of basic learning and life skills, generation of awareness about the afflictions of poverty, building of a positive value and attitude system, raising of consciousness to trigger creative responses to combat poverty and improve quality of life. Cumulatively they lead to the empowerment of human beings.

3. *Eradication of poverty and empowerment of the poor are concerns not just of a section of the population, the poor or some who are concerned about the uplift of the poor. They are the common concerns of all, of the entire humankind. To the extent they can be redressed through basic education, they are also its general concerns.*

4. Basic education is education that fulfils the basic learning needs of all and the different basic education programmes should, therefore, have empowerment as their common core objective although its pursuit may take different forms with different groups of learners.

5. The reorientation may range from making existing programme contents poverty sensitive by 'add-on's, strengthening of inputs, reorganization of contents, reordering of priorities among different components and adoption of innovative methodologies to more comprehensive actions like designing and implementation of poverty group specific curricula.

6. Poverty being a multi-sectoral concern, basic education interventions will impact learner behaviour to the extent poverty redressal policies and actions from other development sectors coordinate and converge with basic education efforts.

7. The reorientation proposals made are of a qualitative kind having to do with regeneration of educational content and

processes, capacity building and consciousness raising of learners and educational functionaries. It is presumed that access and essential facilities exist for the minimal functioning of basic education services.

Reorienting goals and objectives

Basic education should function as a constructive instrument of social transformation and not fight shy of directly addressing developmental issues. If poverty is to be fought through basic education programmes then their goals and objectives should boldly reflect this declaration of intent. It is no doubt true that the WCEFA articulation of basic learning needs as those comprising both essential tools of learning and basic learning content required by human beings for their development as individuals and participating members of the society encapsulates poverty eradication and quality of life concerns. It may also be that the objectives of primary schooling and other basic education programmes in all countries echo similar noble sentiments. Such implicit concern for the poor and their problems should not, however, remain only at the philosophical level. It should boldly manifest in the programme goals and objectives. When so manifested, empowerment of the poor would become the overarching goal of all basic education programmes although its pursuit may take different forms in different programmes.

Imparting greater visibility to poverty and quality of life concerns in the objectives will also lead to a critical examination of programme designs, structures, contents and methods. For example, declaration of empowerment in unambiguous terms as the goal of primary education will have the advantage of drawing the attention of all concerned towards extant primary education processes and practices and pave the way for their orientation in the direction of making primary education an effective instrument for combating poverty. While explicit declaration of intent by itself is no guarantee for its congruence with practical action, it will have the advantage of providing a definite direction to the planning, organization and delivery of the various components of basic education programmes-curricular, pedagogical and administrative – and imparting to the whole enterprise a dimension of accountability. Even more, it will bring the programmes closer to other development services, contribute towards their unified and coordinated functioning and facilitate their effective convergence. When so oriented towards empowerment, basic education programmes cannot, of course, remain "educational" in a neutral, narrowly academic sense. But basic education, rightly understood, was never meant to be equated with sterile, bookish learning.

Eradication of poverty and ensuring a better life for all, it must be made clear, is a common concern of all and the stake holders are not the poverty population groups only. As such it ranks as a general, core objective of national education in any country. The nature and kind of programme interventions towards the pursuit of the goal may however vary depending upon the specific needs of diverse groups of learners and other contextual factors. *As a common core objective, basic education should seek to awaken all about the afflictions of poverty, sensitize them about the need to redress this human condition, build a knowledge and value base that strongly supports equality, social justice and human dignity and develop a sense of commitment and determination among all to fight poverty.*

Programme contents

"Programme contents" refers to the varieties of learning activities and experiences provided in the different basic education programmes in the form of academic courses and subjects, skill training sessions, practical activities, work experiences, visits, interactions and so on in order to develop in the learners relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Normally the term curriculum is used to denote such learning experiences. But the term is invariably used in connection with formal schooling and has come to acquire a rigid, inflexible character about it. Since the concern here is not only with formal primary schooling but also literacy training and non formal education the reference even when the term curriculum is used is to the substance or content of the programmes as explained above.

Both the choice of content and its organization in basic education programmes differ according to programme parameters like goals, duration, structure and learner clientele. Formal primary schooling caters to children in the 5/6-11 age group and its curriculum is usually organized around subjects, courses or broad areas of study albeit in different ways and following different approaches. The primary curriculum in the countries of the Asia-Pacific region includes languages(s), mathematics, knowledge of environment, physical and health education, art education, moral education, work experience/education, life skills. These are taught as such or in combinations carrying different titles and based on different classificatory principles. Adult education/literacy training programmes are normally addressed to adults in the productive age group (usually 15-18 plus) and their orientations, goals and duration vary depending upon learner characteristics and perceived learning needs. Usually, they pursue a range of objectives from functional literacy, practical knowledge and skills to post literacy and continuing education, vocationally oriented training and education for active, equal and responsible participation in society. Then there are programmes of non formal education primarily catering to non-enrolled and drop out children from formal schools with a view to provide them a second chance and help them to continue their learning in the formal system.

If basic education programmes are to directly address the empowerment needs of learners then necessary changes are called for not only in the selection, presentation and delivery of contents but also in the basic orientation of their designs. The nature and kind of these changes that are implied by the commitment to the empowerment goal cannot, however, be suggested *a priori*. These have to be worked out with reference to specified learner groups, their identified learning and living needs and the concrete socio-economic-cultural context in which they live and function.

Critical appraisal of existing curricula

To direct their thrust towards empowerment of the poor one should begin by taking a critical look at the programme contents from the standpoint of where and how they fall short in dealing with poverty and quality of life issues. It may be that curriculum components that are believed to directly and effectively make a dent on the poverty front, for example, income generating skills, are not accorded their due weightage (in terms of instructional time, marks/grades, certification requirements in examination) or that the learning experiences in the area are not organized around sound pedagogical and psychological principles or that the teaching-learning materials are ineffective or even that actual curriculum transaction in the classrooms is woefully unhelpful in skill development. Secondly, the curricular inputs in certain areas directly concerned with improvement of quality of life, for example, health, nutrition, population education may not be intensive and strong enough to impact learner behaviour. Such a situation may call for a re-examination of the objectives, content and organization of learning experiences in this area. Thirdly, the curriculum may be totally lacking in certain inputs that a commitment to empowering the poor through basic education seems to entail for example, rights education – child's rights, women's rights, human rights. Also, it is a well known fact that the poor child suffers from low self-esteem which perpetuates poverty. Yet appropriate curricular inputs in the form of opportunities for the learners to participate in decision making processes concerning matters that affect their own lives and build their self-confidence may be found wanting in the curriculum. Redemption of such a situation would imply search for and introduction of fresh curricular inputs. Overarching all these considerations is the need to examine whether the basic education curriculum is located in a context, the context of poverty. Situation of the curriculum in the life, occupation and culture of the poverty groups is critically important for the inputs to influence the lives of the learners. Lastly, the gap that exists in many country contexts between the official and intended curriculum and the curriculum that is actually implemented is a matter of very serious concern and needs to be addressed as a priority. Non observance of critical curricular provisions in actual curriculum transaction and lack of zeal and competence in their effective implementation as happens all too often, for example, to awareness generating, skill and attitude building areas, would nullify all efforts of curricular reorientation towards empowerment of the learners.

Summing up, reorientation of basic education programme contents towards the goal of empowering the poor requires taking a hard look at the existing programme offerings particularly from the stand point of their appropriateness, adequacy and effectiveness in dealing with poverty concerns to facilitate the focusing and convergence of the various learning activities and experiences towards empowerment objectives. The following set of questions is only indicative of the depth and the nature of qualitative inquiry involved in the task.

- ☐ How adequately are the critical concerns of the poor represented in the programme contents? How were these identified?
- ☐ Do the programme contents address the common learning needs of all or the identified needs of poverty groups?
- ☐ How are poverty related contents treated in the curriculum? As academic units of learning? As empowerment for learners to take action? Or as problems that the poor encounter in their daily lives? What provisions exist in the curriculum to develop problem-solving skills?
- ☐ How do developmental issues figure in the programme contents? How are these to be transacted with learners? Are community activities provided for in the curriculum?
- ☐ Do the programme contents converge towards a developmental goal? Or do they appear as disparate learning units? Do they converge towards empowerment objecties?
- ☐ Are the curricular contents situated in a context-rural, urban, tribal, women, poor? Or are they context free or do they claim to be context fair? How are basic needs content presented? Are their poverty dimensions sufficiently emphasized? Are they at a level of generality or principle capable of being interpreted in contextual situations, in learning sequences?
- ☐ Do the contents reflect priority in favour of poverty eradication and quality of life learning experiences? How? In weightages? Do the learning experiences provide for the development of proficiencies for action in regard to eradication of poverty?
- ☐ If the programme contents are common to all, are there enabling provisions to contextualize them for poverty groups? How adequate are these provisions?

- ☐ What kinds of provisions exist in the curriculum to develop awareness among poverty groups about their condition, 'conscientize' them and take action to improve it? Are they adequate and effective?

Learning needs of poverty groups

A promising approach to make basic education programmes particularly responsive to the life concerns of the poor is to begin with identification of their specific learning needs. The phrase 'specific learning needs of the poor' is not intended to suggest that these needs are of a different *genre* from basic learning needs of others. It must be strongly emphasized here that the *basic* learning needs of *all* are the same and these have been eloquently given expression to in the World Declaration on Education for All. Here, attention is being drawn to the need for looking at the basic learning needs of all from the perspective of empowerment of the vast multitudes of learners constituting the poor.

The only environment which the poor have for seeking fulfilment of their learning needs is institutional basic education, unlike the more advantaged for whom such environments exist also at home and in a variety of situations in the wider society. If basic education programmes do not adequately reflect basic learning needs or reflect only a part of them or, worse, distort them in favour of bookish learning as in the case of formal primary schooling in most countries, the worst sufferers will be the poor.

Categorizations of learning needs of diverse groups of learners have been illustrated abundantly in curriculum literature. A typology of learning needs of poverty population groups derives from an analysis of the complex interconnections and interplay of the sociological, cultural, economic and educational dimensions of poverty. The poor being highly heterogeneous with poverty manifesting in a variety of characteristics any classification and grouping of learning needs will have to be specific to identified poverty groups. However general typologies of learning needs of the poor can be derived from analysis of basic learning needs of all. An illustration is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Learning needs of the poor – a typology

Area	Learning needs
1. Basic Tools of Learning	Skills of literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving, to enable one to read, write, communicate through speech and writing and carrying out simple arithmetical operations as required in day to day living.
2. Quality of life	Knowledge about the immediate physical and social environment: what things are and how they work. Knowledge and skills relating to health, hygiene, housing, family life, sanitation, nutrition.
3. Productivity skills	Technological, managerial, entrepreneurial skills as would help in increasing productivity. Intelligent and sustainable resource generation and utilization skills. Understanding of poverty – environment relationship. Understanding/skills with respect to effective use of basic services. Creatively responding to income earning opportunities. Opportunities to participate in work situations.
4. Organization, attitudes and values	Being aware of one's rights as a human being, as a child, as a woman. Understanding of how civic life is organized. Skills of discussion, cooperative decision making for effective participation in community life and developmental activities. Self-esteem, confidence, courage and ability to take positive decisions, actions, initiatives concerning their own lives.

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Ideally, however, what is needed is a pro-poor point of view, and within that broad category, target-group specific curricular designs for different poverty groups and sub groups – the rural poor, the urban poor, tribal populations, women and girls, poor, out-of-school youth and adults and so on. The specificity to be imparted to the curriculum may be conceived in terms of characteristic features, for example, "ruralized curriculum", "working children's curriculum" etc. The range of possibilities here is wide: starting from mere provision of poverty related topics in an academic curriculum to centering the entire curriculum around development/poverty concerns where knowledge and skill will be acquired as outcomes of the process of participation in real life developmental activities. Imparting contextual relevance to the curriculum has been accepted as a strategic policy for universalizing primary education especially among disadvantaged population groups for the past few decades and several national and international projects have adopted it as their major plank. What is now being suggested is the fine tuning of this strategy to address the very specific empowerment learning needs of the poor.

Prioritization among competing objectives

An anti-poverty curriculum with empowerment as its main plank would also need to set up its priorities among the identified learning needs of the poverty groups. The obvious criterion for prioritization is how critically important are these needs in dealing with felt and perceived poverty issues and problems. If a trade-off among the various groups of learning needs is unavoidable, it has to be obviously in favour of those the fulfilment of which is considered a 'must' for empowering the poor. A case in point is literacy and numeracy skills. Notwithstanding scepticism and absence of conclusive research evidence on the 'supposed' power of literacy, one cannot question the crucial role of literacy and numeracy skills in the basic education of an individual. Literacy and numeracy are universally considered as essential skills and basic tools of knowledge. In this sense they are truly life empowering skills. The need to acquire these skills is all the more greater in the case of the poverty population groups. Exposure to functional literacy alone is known to contribute significantly to increase of farm productivity. Also fertility rates have been found to reduce significantly among those who attain a certain level of literacy. On this basis one could argue for greater emphasis on the acquisition of these skills in any basic education programme. This emphasis may be reflected in increased curriculum/instructional time accorded to these skills.

Another critical area especially in the context of non formal and adult education concerns vocational training and income and resource generation activities. Both in view of its motivational advantage and its effectiveness as a pedagogic strategy, many literacy training, adult education and non formal education programmes have made vocational training as their spearhead. Considering the direct contribution this component is believed to make towards poverty eradication and providing a concrete and meaningful context to learning, efforts are directed towards the development of more functional models of vocational training and their effective implementation in the different basic education programmes. The point that is being driven is that the claims of different learning areas for inclusion and position of importance in the curriculum should be judged in terms of their positive pay-offs to the goals of empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty.

Organization of content

The content of basic education programmes can be conceived as comprising of three essential components from the point of view of empowerment – equipping the poor with the basic tools of learning (literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving skills) enhancing their productivity and income generating capacity and organizing them for active participation in society. The degree of emphases on these content components – the weightages to be given in the overall programme design, the objectives, scope and transaction strategies, may, however, differ according to the needs and motivations of the learners and other programme parameters. All the basic learning needs – the essential learning tools as well as the package of life skills required for one's development as an individual and as a participating member of the society – can be meaningfully integrated with these components in programmes of literacy training and adult education, non formal and formal primary schooling.

Literacy skills

Literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving skills are generally identified as basic tools of learning. Of these literacy has been at the forefront of all basic education efforts. "If we wish to combat poverty, injustice and violence that so often results from them we must begin by mobilizing minds through education and literacy. A literate world is not only one where people can read and write, it is a world in which the human potential has been liberated and placed in the service of progress." says the UNESCO Declaration on International Literacy. Illiteracy is considered the major obstacle for development and its eradication is believed to clear the path for removal of poverty. That the Asia Pacific region houses the largest percentage of world's illiterates (71% of which 64% are girls and women) points to the magnitude of the challenge before basic education.

There are claims and counter claims about the power of literacy to influence the living conditions of the people. It is argued that literacy does not empower people and that the many claims about its benefits in respect of health, productivity, community organization, population growth etc. are bogus. From the point of view of poverty eradication, increasing literacy rates may not yield immediate pay-offs, it is pointed out. It has even been suggested that eradication of illiteracy is not a necessary condition for the removal of poverty. Instances are adduced where there is an absence of correlation between literacy levels and economic development indicators. In Kerala (a state in India) despite high literacy (96%), low birth rate (1.2) and low child mortality rate (16), unemployment is said to be rampant among the educated and the gross domestic product is also low in comparison with several other states where education has made less progress. There are also country contexts where illiteracy eradication is not included in the package of poverty alleviation strategies.

There is no need to dwell further on these arguable observations. Although the world continues to debate on the why, what and how of literacy, it is plainly obvious that having to live in a world steeped in the culture of the printed word, possession of literacy skills is a simple question of survival. Literacy skills, as of now anyway, constitute essential learning tools without which one cannot have access to modern knowledge. As to literacy and development, it is unthinkable how development can be sustained in the context of changing technology in the absence of reasonable levels of literacy among the people. It is also difficult to conceive how an illiterate person can be empowered in the true sense of the term or that he/she can live with dignity in a literate society.

Controversy also dogs the meaning of literacy. Most would agree that literacy denotes aspects of reading and writing. But what specific abilities or knowledge count as literacy and what levels can and should be defined for measurement continue to be debated about. Literacy, it is pointed out, is a cultural phenomenon. It can be adequately defined and understood only within each culture in which it exists. It is not surprising that definition of literacy may never be permanently fixed. Whether literacy includes computer skills, mental arithmetic or civic responsibility will depend on how the public and political leaders of each society define this most basic of basic skills.

What is most important to note is that pursuit of literacy for its own sake separated from other life concerns would in no way help the poor to deal with their poverty. This is a wise saw which is as old as the history of literacy training itself. Ever since, the concept of functional literacy has come to dominate literacy training policies and practices, although functional literacy itself has been interpreted in many different ways. According to the classic definition " a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and the skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group." Without entering into debate on what constitutes functional literacy, one could assert that what the poor need is literacy that is functional in the sense that they can practically apply it in relation to meeting their basic needs – health, food, shelter. Behind the failure of many adult literacy programmes lies their failure to link literacy to wider development. It may be that literacy in itself is not empowering but the process of learning literacy may transform lives. As has been rightly pointed out, if the literacy class becomes a forum in which people can actively participate as equals and engage with some critical issues of their community then some of the benefits of literacy might pass from the realms of myth to reality. Also literacy training must be integrated with participation in productive work to yield the maximum benefit. Literacy training programmes can contribute to the eradication of poverty to the extent they combine literacy learning with productive skills training and organization building. It is such 'Literacy plus' programmes rather than literacy training organized as a single package intervention that can be expected to make a dent on poverty. Fusing literacy process with empowering process is more likely to yield better success than focusing on one of them alone. They mutually consolidate and reinforce each other. Literacy gives practical skills which help in the empowerment process and the empowerment process in turn creates uses for literacy in people's everyday lives.

Even functional literacy may not be sufficient if the objective is to attack the root causes of poverty. If literacy is to function as a real instrument of the empowerment of the poor it must be perceived in an even wider perspective than just the development of skills of functioning in an existing social order. It should transcend these and function as an instrument of total transformation of the individual as "enlightenment literacy".

Productive work

Integrating the learning process with productive work is a very important, time honoured principle of curriculum which has given rise to major educational movements in most countries of the world. Mahatma Gandhi's craft centred education which sought to build all basic learning around productive craft in India is one example. This principle acquires great significance in the present context because the disadvantaged population groups usually have a very strong tradition of manual and physical work. Curricular learning when built on this tradition will be assimilated much more meaningfully than when divorced from it. The school should value children's acquaintance with real work and their knowledge, skills, attitudes relevant for their survival and support their further refinement, development. Yet the academic tradition in formal schooling is so strong that manual work is considered as an impediment to learning or at best treated as something of an extra. Here is one example where the "advantage" the poor possess is either considered as an enemy of learning or ignored altogether as irrelevant. The critical significance of work orientation of basic education as a strategy for empowerment has already been discussed. Here, its major curricular implications especially the objectives and scope of productive work in literacy training, non formal education and primary schooling will be considered.

Productive work can take many forms and can be used to pursue a variety of objectives in basic education depending upon the age level and learning needs of the learners. Whatever be the programme, productive work would impart it a relevance to life and give "teeth" to it to address poverty concerns with purpose and force. In formal primary education 'work' finds a place in the curriculum in the form of 'work experience', 'work education', 'livelihood education' etc. But, in most situations, it is not pursued with the seriousness it deserves mainly due to the stranglehold of the academic tradition that dictates curricular and evaluation practices. Productive work at the primary level can be pursued to strengthen and reinforce general education objectives, to develop awareness about the world of work, build positive attitudes, values and habits of work like cooperativeness, team work, creativity, persistence etc. There are several ways in which work can be meaningfully brought into the classroom. One approach is for the primary school in a locality to have as its school goal an appropriate poverty alleviation programme or activity and derive all its work experience activities from that goal. Another approach recommended is the introduction of life oriented and skill based work experience in a non oppressive and joyful manner to promote earning while learning. Also, the work that the children do at home and in work sites like farms can be used to contextualize teaching and learning. Primary education should evolve a strategy to exploit children's engagement with work outside school to impart them empowerment knowledge, skills, attitudes and values and develop itself into a self contained and fulfilling experience.

In the non formal channel, where the majority of learners may be working youth there are two types of programmes – non formal, primary (basic) education for children who are out of school for various reasons including demands of work and a variety of programmes with diverse objectives to meet the needs of youth and adult learners. In the latter category, some non formal education programmes are especially geared to generate rural employment, income generation, self-employment or small business enterprise as in Thailand. These programmes offer short duration skill training programmes as such or integrate vocational/income generation skills with basic literacy training. The objectives of productive work and the forms in which it is to be implemented in the different types of non formal education programmes have to be decided with specific reference to the needs of the learners.

The primary need of the poor is to equip themselves with technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills for income generation and to have them continually upgraded and retrained to cope with the changes in the employment market to sustain their earning power. Income generation programmes (IGP) on their own or as components of literacy training and adult education can fulfil these needs. IGPs seek to develop basic and higher order occupational skills, entrepreneurial skills and provide back up technical and support services. They seek to prepare the poor for self-employment, wage employment and for enlarging and enriching products, services, businesses of those already employed.

IGPs attack poverty (i) by empowering the poor to identify their economic needs and explore ways and means of fulfilling those needs (ii) by developing self confidence and ability to undertake IG activities through training and motivation (iii) by providing opportunities for continuous upgrading of vocational knowledge and skills for gainful employment and (iv) by developing a team spirit for working together for sustainable social and economic growth. IGPs for the rural poor should be designed with reference to the characteristics of the rural learners who may be illiterate youth and adults, school leavers and drop outs, traditional craftsmen and rural artisans, small scale businessmen. They should also relate to rural occupations: farm and non farm, social forestry, rural transport, rural industries, rural trading, traditional crafts.

Organization, attitudes and values

Empowering the poor goes beyond helping them with information and resources needed to deal with their immediate poverty problems. It is primarily concerned with attacking the root causes of poverty and not just its outward manifestations. Empowerment in this deeper sense involves enabling the poor to properly perceive their condition, to be aware of the constraints which social structures impose on them and how to overcome them, to acquire understanding and skills needed to deal with the poverty conditions, to develop confidence in themselves, to organize themselves and fight poverty collectively and with determination. The range and variety of learnings which the poor need for their empowerment in this deeper sense constitute the "Organization, Attitudes, Values" or "Conscientization" package.

Attention has been drawn in several studies to the critical importance of changing the role of poor as passive recipients of doles to organizing them as a regular and active pressure group in the domain of the State. For this to happen the poor's right to organization is to be recognized and their institutional capability with respect to access to resources and bargaining power is to be developed. Education as a means of conscientization can help the poor to be conscious, articulate and assertive about their rights and needs and embolden them to exert themselves for securing their rights.

Attitude and value learning is pervasive over the entire domain of the curriculum. It need not be looked upon as a sphere of teaching-learning activity separate from or over and above the other curricular and cocurricular activities. In all genuine learning whether it is literacy skills training or participating in productive work, whether it is study of environment or doing mathematical sums attitudes and values are inextricably involved. Attitude and value development should therefore be integrally woven into the teaching of all curricular and cocurricular activities. In more specific terms, the poor should be helped in overcoming defeatist outlook, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, fatalism and superstition and in developing self-esteem, ability to take positive decisions, actions, initiatives concerning their own lives. They should also be helped in developing awareness of their rights as human beings, skills of organizing themselves around developmental concerns, working together, cooperative and collective decision making and effective participation in civic life and development.

Although attitudes and values are to be integrated in all basic education learning experiences, there should also be special efforts mounted to focus learning on values and attitudes. Rights education with the objectives of generating awareness about rights and preparing learners in asserting their rights could be an important curricular input. Also specially designed learning experiences and situations could be provided to promote self-confidence, self-esteem of learners, opportunities for making choices and decision making on matters that concern their lives and develop organizational skills. Even more effective would be the transformation of the entire range of school and classroom practices in such a way that the learners learn to choose, decide, take action, organize themselves, build confidence, enhance self-esteem by actually choosing, deciding etc. in various situations that arise in day to day school life. 'Learn through living' should begin from school life first.

There are no easy curricular prescriptions for attaining affective domain objectives which result from a complex interplay of various personal, social factors during human beings constant interaction among themselves and with the environment outside. Attitude and organization building for empowerment of the poor cannot also be a neutral, apolitical process. When the poor organize themselves to address the structural roots of poverty – the system of inequitable power relationships – inevitably tensions will be created. Engaging the poor in transforming the reality and in fighting against injustice and exploitation will provoke reactions from those who stand to gain from the status quo. But these are not to be considered as "risks" but as inevitable ingredients of empowerment education. There is no way to fight poverty on an enduring basis other than transforming the human beings in the way they think, feel and do. And education is in a pre-eminent position as far as bringing about such changes in human beings is concerned.

'Strengths' of the poor and community knowledge

Two other aspects that need to be seriously taken note of in curriculum planning are the 'strengths' and 'advantages' which the poor possess and community knowledge and technology. Frequent references have been made so far to the deprivations that learners from poverty groups suffer, like lack of self-confidence, low self-image, defeatism and so on. But this should not blind one to the fact that the poor also exhibit special abilities, character traits and characteristics that need to be reinforced and strengthened. Constant struggle with life makes children from poverty groups more "mature" than other children. Learners from poverty groups demonstrate a high degree of survival skills. Ethnographic studies reveal that although illiterate, the 'disadvantaged' ethnic groups have the capacity to articulate what they want and need, given the opportunity and motivation. People's initiatives and crisis coping efforts during disaster prone years in Bangladesh and elsewhere have received acclaim. A cooperative system of life characterized poverty communities in the past in several country contexts although it got eroded with the passage of time. Poverty group learners also exhibit dexterity in certain work skills which can be skills relevant for tasks in formal learning situations. Studies on disadvantaged children have reported that, allowing for cultural variations, children from poverty groups exhibit such 'strengths' as high degree of motor skills and psychomotor competence, high competence in survival skills, high degree of responsibility, independence, self-reliance, emotional stability, resilience, high tendency for peer group learning, peer group solidarity and high flexibility in social relationships. Obviously one cannot expect all these characteristics and qualities to be found in all poor learners and to the same degree and extent. As has been maintained throughout this work, the poor and the disadvantaged do not constitute a uniform homogeneous group. The learning assets and needs of learners from poverty groups must therefore be identified with reference to specific poverty contexts. The challenge lies not in identifying these but in translating them into empowerment learning experiences in formal and non formal learning settings. What is to be fought against, in this endeavour, is the prevailing social stratification of basic education and the societal division of school knowledge into high and low status. For example, children from indigenous cultures have been found to name and identify a variety of species of plants and animals far more than their counterparts anywhere else. This rich knowledge of the flora and fauna of their environment is, however, rarely, if at all, acknowledged either in the curriculum or in textbooks. At the same time, what is heartening is the recognition given to this aspect of empowerment education in several innovative and experimental basic education projects and its incorporation both in the content of learning and its transaction with learners.

It is being increasingly realized that approaches to development should build on rather than replace or substitute traditional knowledge, technologies and institutions of the people. The World Declaration on

Education for All was based on the recognition by the World Community that "traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage have a value and validity in their own right and a capacity to both define and promote development." Traditional knowledge, also referred to as community knowledge or local science refers to values, norms, beliefs concerning various aspects and stages of the life cycle – birth, death, health, sickness, courtship, marriage. It also refers to facts, norms, technologies governing specific activities (for example, those concerning earning livelihood), traditional institutions (like those of dispensing justice in tribal communities) and processes of cultural transmission in the group (for example, festivals, rituals, ceremonies, customs, songs, folklore, stories, symbols, dramas, ways of communicating and counting, calendar based on festivals and natural occurrences in the environment, ways of healing and treating diseases). Community knowledge and technology acts as a rich source of material not only for functional literacy programmes but also in formal primary schooling. There is useable knowledge in community traditions and technologies, for example, herbal healing (an ecologically sound practice), natural planting methods (inter cropping, multiple cropping, organic farming, organic fertilisers), fishing (the traditional principle of not taking from the sea more than is necessary), weather and earthquake forecasting. There are values in folk sayings worth promoting (respect for all forms of life, service to others, social responsibilities, discipline and hard work, patriotism, honesty, prudence, fortitude). Traditional and popular metaphors and symbols present in the community can be used in the teaching of concepts.[8] Basic curriculum should respect the existence of a variety of knowledge systems and technologies and suitably relate and integrate them with the basic learnings it seeks to promote. The real empowerment of the people takes place only when they are helped to see the corpus of knowledge which they already possess as cultural heritage in new light, understand the reason why of things and make judicious use of it while continuing their efforts to deepen and widen their understanding of the world.

The strengths of the poor and indigenous knowledge and technology, it should be noted, provide invaluable curricular inputs in their own right. They should therefore be exploited, after due validation, to both define and enrich curricular learnings. It is not just equity considerations but also sound pedagogy to anchor empowerment objectives in the indigenous culture of the people. It would do great good to the self-image and self-concept of the poor if their basic education develops out of their living culture and not come as an imposition from outside.

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[8] Doronila, Maria, op. cit.

Enhancing sensitivity of learning contents to poverty concerns

Basic education programmes even in their existing formats are built around common learning themes keeping in view the basic learning requirements of children and adults. These contents may or may not be addressing poverty questions directly although the programmes themselves are ostensibly designed to cater to the learning needs of the most needy, the poor. Health, environment, nutrition, for example, may figure as "learning" areas in an academic sense and not as critical life issues that the poor constantly encounter. The condition of the poor with respect to health and nutrition, the causes and consequences of that condition and the societal obligation to redress that condition may or may not appear as critical dimensions of learning and education. If it does the kind, extent and intensity of references to the poor may vary. Looking at the programme contents and their transaction from this perspective – does it exude sensitivity to poverty concerns? is the purpose to inform and develop understanding? or does it go beyond to sensitize learners about the human condition and induce them towards constructive action? how is the content presented? as academic learning units or as life problems? what facts and understandings are emphasised? what critical messages are conveyed? how are they related to the poverty condition? – it is possible to explore ways and means of enhancing their sensitivity to poverty concerns. The following suggestions may be considered in this regard.

- ❑ *Address specific poverty issues* in health, food, nutrition, environment and other such areas. Over exploitation of environmental resources, for example, forests, is held to be a major cause of environmental degradation. The poor especially the tribals have a symbiotic relationship with nature and depend for their livelihood totally on forest produce. Should conservation mean depriving the poor of their only source of sustaining their lives? How do we deal with this dilemma?

❑ *Add 'poverty facts'* to presentations wherever relevant. 'Food and nutrition', for example, need not be confined to transmission of information and academic explanations of food production, nutritional values of different foods and calorie requirement. It should also make references to such facts as the percentage of people who can afford to spend on balanced food, why the poor do not have sufficient to eat although food production increases each year.

❑ *Add 'affective' content.* Themes like health, illiteracy, food and nutrition, status of children and women are not academic learning units of cold facts and laws, they have heart rending emotional overtones which must be experienced by the learners. For example, "It is unconscionable that 40000 children die every day. Reaching the goal of reducing the IMR by one third will mean "only" 21000 will die every day, still a frightening figure." "More money – 80% of global spending on water and sanitation – goes to technologies such as water treatment plants costing as much as $550 per capita suited to wealthy urban environments. Low cost technologies such as bore holes and wells with hand pumps suitable in many rural and urban situations cost less than $50 per capita."[9]

❑ *Relate content to developmental projects/activities.* To contextualize teaching-learning, the content could be related/integrated with any developmental activity taking place in the locality. For example, health, population, nutrition learnings could be linked with the local operation of basic services and their optimal utilization.

❑ *Make explanations more complete by including the poverty factor.* Poverty is involved as a factor in explanation of obvious cases like population but left out in the explanation of several not-so-obvious events and processes, for example, war ravages. "More than 1.5 m children in poor countries have died as a direct result of war during the past decade." "Everyday 40000 children below the age of five die. The immediate causes are specific illnesses such as diarrhoea, acute respiratory infection, measles, tetanus, etc. But malnutrition, lack of access to safe water, sanitation and primary health care and ignorance and poverty are all major factors in these deaths."[10]

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[9] Quoted from *Children and Development in the 1990s* – a UNICEF Source book, 1990.

☐ *Acknowledge indigenous knowledge, culture, skills.* Indigenous knowledge (ethno science) and the wisdom in relation to health, treatment of diseases, food habits, available in the communities should be understood in the proper perspective and suitably acknowledged. In its own right, it could form part of curricular learning. It could enrich other learning contents. It could also be used to explain the underlying science. The low self-esteem of the poverty groups is partly due to the irrational, outright rejection of their traditional culture and ways of life.

☐ *Incorporate the special 'strengths' of poverty groups in curricular content.* Children from poverty population groups bring to the school their own 'strengths' apart from the many disadvantages which hinder their learning. The special qualities and characteristics which children from poverty groups possess, for example, practical knowledge and skills related to survival, knowledge of local flora and fauna should get its due place both in the curriculum and teaching-learning materials. A related aspect is the existence of positive factors in the societies of the poor like the determination to survive in the midst of adversities, man made or natural and cooperative living and functioning. Such characteristics must be reinforced through curriculum.

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[10] Quoted from *Children and Development in the 1990*, op. cit.

- ☐ *Provide for problem solving situations.* Ideally, the entire curriculum for learners from poverty groups should be built around their felt problems of life, for example, How do I take care of my health? How do I earn my living? What should I do to grow more food from my land? How do I communicate with others? However, it is possible to bring even a conventional curriculum close to life by including appropriate problem solving situations in the different basic need areas like health, food, nutrition, home, family. These could be in the form of learning projects for children, youth and adults which provide them an opportunity to think, plan and carry out actions on their own or cooperatively in groups.

- ☐ *Provide for participatory learning activities.* While group projects as described above provide for participatory learning as a process of problem solving, participatory learning as a basic principle should inform curriculum transactions in all basic education programmes – literacy training, primary schooling and non formal learning. Discussion, dialogue, reporting, interviewing, field visit, observation should be built into curriculum transaction in all content areas.

- ☐ *Train skills.* Skills are acquired through constant practice. Learners acquire the skills of reading, writing, speaking, problem solving, work skills by actually engaging themselves in the respective activities and not by being told or taught about them.

- ☐ *Teach to generate critical consciousness.* To be conscious is to know, to be aware of. But to be critically conscious is to be doing much more. It is to question, to reason, to reflect and reach that state of consciousness when one feels compelled to launch oneself into action, to alter reality. The poor need such knowledge about the world they live in as would not only help them to understand the forces that make them what they are but also empower them to gain control over those forces. In 'health', in 'food and nutrition', in 'environment' and in several content areas there is such knowledge in the form of critical information, messages and this should inform curriculum content, materials and teaching-learning strategies.

Summing up

Internal transformation of programme contents and processes is crucial for directing the thrusts of basic education towards empowerment of the poor. A comprehensive review of basic education curricula on the lines indicated in the foregoing discussion would prepare the ground to identify the needed interventions to impart target group and goal specificity to curricula. These interventions include: deriving contents from identified learning needs, prioritization of curriculum objectives, reorganizing and strengthening of critical curriculum components, reorganizing existing provisions with reference to courses, learning activities and teaching methods and enhancing sensitivity of curriculum contents to poverty concerns.

Teaching-learning methods and materials

Curricular intentions, after all, only supply the necessary conditions. They do not by themselves ensure the realization of basic education objectives whatever these may be. To be effective, the intentions must be sincerely and seriously pursued in actual curriculum transaction.

The needs of learners from poverty settings – children in primary schools, adults in literacy workshops and youth pursuing non formal education – are such that they can be effectively addressed only when the learners are made to "own" the programmes and actively participate in their own learning. But such participation cannot be procured unless their learning and living needs are integrated not just on paper but more importantly in actual transaction. Typically, the learners from poverty groups may be more concerned about such matters as, for example, taking proper care of cattle, goat, sheep, testing soil and water for corps, raising new crops, keeping accounts of milk received and sold, understanding the calendar, making purchases for the family, reasons for frost, drought, rain, taking care of health, overcoming diseases, how to think, how not to be embarrassed in the presence of strangers, how not to be afraid of asking questions about things one does not know. The challenge is organizing learning sequences around such actual life concerns and this can be met only when there is a shared perception of the core purposes of the programme among the learners, the learning mediators (teachers) and the general community.

Learning sequences built around such basic needs of life are best transacted by organizing learning around learners own activities, contextualizing learning by drawing from learners' out-of-school experience, involving the learners in decision making concerning their learning and other affairs and so on. The critical learning needs of learners from poverty groups are developing productivity and income generation skills, overcoming low self-esteem, developing ability to take positive initiatives and actions on their own behalf, learning to work cooperatively, developing ability and confidence to make decisions concerning their own lives, being aware of their fundamental rights and learning to exercise them. These needs, obviously, cannot be catered to by treating the learners as passive receptacles of information issuing from the authority of the teacher or the textbook. What is required is a teaching-learning strategy which puts the learners at the centre of self-esteem increasing, productivity enhancing, confidence building, decision making, awareness generating processes and activities and provides opportunities for them to learn through actual living. This basic principle of empowerment education should guide methods and materials.

It is true that the principle of learner-centred, activity based teaching applies to all good learning, but what is not generally appreciated is that its non-observance in practice hits hard not all but those who come from disadvantaged population groups. It need not be reiterated here that the non-disadvantaged children are already 'schooled' in their homes about school practices and how to succeed in school and therefore do not experience the same difficulty as the poor although in the process they will have missed the joy of learning. A major action area would therefore be the designing of a variety of participatory teaching-learning strategies that involve the learners in their own learning. The possibilities in this area are many and documented experience abounds with the descriptions of various participatory teaching techniques and methods. The important point to note is that such approaches and methods cannot be stipulated beforehand but should evolve from out of the learning needs, styles and other socio-psychological factors specific to poverty group learners.

It should also be noted that teaching learners for empowerment can by no means be a mechanical, routine act. Poverty issues are not value-neutral issues that can be addressed in a matter of fact way with unconcern and detachment. On the other hand, they are to be approached with a deep sense of human values, commitment to social justice and a zeal for social reconstruction. The implication is that teaching methods and materials should not only exude sensitivity to problems of the poor both in their form and content, but also adopt a pro-active approach in dealing with poverty issues.

The concept of learning materials should be understood in the broader context of the physical and social environment surrounding children coming from poverty groups. Even the concept of school itself should not be equated with buildings, furniture and other paraphernalia that traditionally have come to define it. The school essentially is a facilitating learning environment for the children and the form and shape which it takes should be determined by the nature and variety of learning activities which the children will be engaged in. Such learning environments can be created in remote rural locations, hilly and forest areas, in difficult urban situations. Similarly, teachers need to understand learning resources in its broadest sense as objects in the environment – physical (a twig, tree, stones, river forest, etc.) and human that can be used to promote learning without equating them with sophisticated and expensive mechanical gadgets. Having made this point one should hasten to add that children from poverty groups do need learning materials including audio-visual and printed materials that attract them, induce in them the desire to learn, inform them, awaken them and make them think and act.

Although the need to include poverty related content in the curriculum and materials of basic education programmes is generally acknowledged (especially in non formal and adult education programmes), the effort seems to be directed more towards providing information rather than generating critical awareness, building attitudes and training skills. Curriculum and textbooks should emphasise critical information in their contents. They should not be treated as academic learning units but as critical life issues that the poor constantly encounter. Further the contents should be so organized and presented that they induce attitude and skill development in the children. In sum, like teaching-learning methods the development of materials too should be guided by the objective of empowerment.

Evaluation of learning outcomes

The overall objective of basic education being human empowerment the attainment of learners must be evaluated with reference to the degree and extent to which the learner has developed empowering knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values. At the macro level the effectiveness of basic education programmes towards poverty eradication could be judged over a period of time in terms of their contribution to identified success indicators. These could be:

- empowerment of the human individual.
- improved quality of living with respect to health, nutrition, education, family life, occupational pursuits, social, moral and cultural values.
- improved standard of living with respect to rise in income and consumption levels, intelligent and sustainable use of environmental resources, improved access to and use of basic services.
- employment and income generation, enhancement of capacity for labour and productivity skills.

From the perspective of learners in formal and non formal learning settings evaluation could be in terms of indicators of learner growth with reference to the overall empowerment goals. In considering what and how much learners achieve whether in formal primary schools or in more flexible, unstructured learning situations and how the degree and quality of such achievement is to be measured, one should not lose sight of the comprehensive range of learnings which basic education seeks to produce – skills of literacy, numeracy, communication, work and productivity skills, life skills, attitudes and values, aesthetic development, knowledge and understanding of physical and social environment and physical and health education. Achievement is to be considered in relation to all aspects of human empowerment – cognitive, attitudinal and skills.

Unfortunately, all too often, the comprehensive range of learnings which basic education aims at, is conveniently forgotten and given a go by and evaluation is restricted to easily measurable but narrow book learnings only. Reference has already made to this distortion of basic education goals in primary schooling and its pernicious influence on evaluation practices causing great harm to the interests of poverty group learners.

The practice, especially in primary schooling, of restricting evaluation to easily measurable (through conventional paper and pencil tests) book learnings only leads to the creation of a situation where teachers, pupils, parents and the community begin to think that what matters in education finally is the marks one scores in the tests and examinations. Since examinations test book learning only, book learning gets the pride of place and curricular experiences having to do with the development of empowerment skills, understanding, attitudes and values either are not provided at all or are converted to book learning performances (repetition, memorization, reproduction) thereby defeating their very purpose. Since teacher, school and learner performances are measured again in terms of examination results the more important (but not easily measurable in traditional terms) curricular experiences aimed at helping children to develop creativity, imagination, self confidence, productivity suffer neglect and basic education loses its point and purpose.

Education, after all, is essentially a normative undertaking. What counts as success or failure in learning can therefore be judged fairly and meaningfully only within a framework of one's own valuations of 'good education', 'good schools', 'successful learning', 'successful teaching' and so on. To be fair, interpretations and judgements of educational standards, quality and achievement should therefore be based, as far as possible, on universal criteria applicable to *all* learners. In any case, the criteria should not prejudge the issue against the poverty groups, as happens, for example, when school success is *equated* with high marks in linguistic and cognitive areas of learning. Such practices not only do immense harm to the interests of the disadvantaged learners, they distort the very meaning and purpose of education.

To conclude, evaluation of learning outcomes in basic education should cover the comprehensive range of objectives. The purpose is to arrive at a quantitative as well as qualitative assessment of each individual learner with reference to the degree and extent to which the learner has been able to develop basic learning and productivity skills, awareness and understanding of the self and the world around and attitudes and values that cumulatively lead to one's empowerment. This may pose a challenge to teachers and learning mediators in view of the range and variety of learnings involved and the variety of evaluation techniques and tools they call for. There is no way but to accept the challenge. In any case, narrow bookish learning concerns should not be allowed to dictate terms to the objectives, content and processes of basic education and destroy its very purpose.

Orienting teachers and learning mediators

Combating poverty through education is, in reality, combating it through teachers and other educational workers who are engaged in the ground level activity of teaching children, youth and adults in schools and other learning settings. The task before them is truly challenging: organizing learning experiences around critical life concerns of poverty group learners, promoting participatory learning and handling their learning needs and problems with sensitivity and understanding. This underscores the need for orientation of all educational personnel who are concerned with "teaching" in different basic education settings. These include teachers in formal primary schools and facilitators and learning mediators of various kinds – instructors in non formal learning centres, educational organizers and workers in literacy training and adult education programmes. The specific qualities – skills, competencies, attitudes and values – required of these educational functionaries should match with the basic education strategy of combating poverty through empowering the poor.

The basic education settings present extremely difficult and diverse learning contexts. The diversity arises due to differences in poverty profiles and empowerment needs of learners and other physical, social, cultural and economic factors. It may also be due to differences in design, structure, duration and objectives of the programmes. The difficulty lies in infrastructural inadequacies (the typical rural primary school or adult/non formal education centre lacks basic facilities and presents a dismal environment) and in the inherent complexity of teaching poverty group learners. The pedagogy (and 'andragogy') involved in the task calls for adoption of special approaches. Accordingly the orientation needs of ground level educational personnel vary. For example, to function as effective learning facilitators in integrated rural development settings teachers need training in such skills as helping rural population in overcoming negative attitudes, organizing and mobilizing the community and entering into working partnerships with them, transacting the learning component in basic services with learners of different age groups and motivations, utilising learning resources available in the community and so on.

Although the reorientation of teachers and learning mediators has to be specific to the learner groups and learning contexts, broadly, their training needs can be seen to lie in three areas – skills and competencies related to teaching, knowledge and understanding of psycho-social aspects of learning among poverty group learners and attitudes and values. The following list illustrates the kind of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values that teachers need in promoting empowerment learning.

Skills and competencies in

- ☐ identifying the learning needs and organizing learning sequences around learning/living needs of the poor.
- ☐ identifying the special abilities and characteristics of poverty group children (practical knowledge of local flora, fauna, manual skills, survival skills) and making use of them in curriculum transaction.
- ☐ developing literacy, reading, writing, communication and problem solving skills.

☐ developing productivity/income generation/work skills.

☐ identifying, mobilizing and utilizing local resources in teaching.

☐ making judicious use of community institutions, traditions, cultural transmission processes (festivals, rituals, ceremonies, customs, songs, dramas, folklore, stories, symbols, communicating and counting ways, ways of dispensing justice etc.) in curriculum transaction.

☐ identifying and making appropriate use of community knowledge and technology (with respect to, for example, health, treatment of diseases, nutrition) in teaching.

☐ relating learning content to developmental activities/ projects.

☐ contextualising teaching/learning with reference to local occupations (for example, agriculture).

☐ organizing learner-centred, activity based, participatory learning – play, projects, discussion, dialogue, observation, visits, integrating academic learning with productive work.

☐ evaluating learners' progress in terms of empowerment objectives.

☐ working cooperatively with parents and community members.

☐ organizing in-community activities through school.

☐ identifying critical information, messages in curriculum content and using them in teaching to generate critical consciousness.

☐ organizing learning situations to involve learners in decision making.

☐ generating processes/activities to enhance self-confidence and self-esteem of learners.

- generating processes/activities to remove negative attitudes – superstition, fatalism, resignation, apathy.
- organizing and mobilizing the poor around developmental concerns, exercising their rights and freedoms and against exploitative practices.

Knowledge and understanding of:

- the poverty situation and the learning needs of the poor in the community.
- poverty eradication policies and schemes (rural youth employment, public distribution system, rural credit etc.), basic services, the various protections given to the poor under social, political and economic legislations (laws governing labour, land reforms, marriage etc.).
- the rights of the poor – human rights, children's rights and women's rights.
- the psycho-social attributes and needs of learners from poverty groups, learners' preferred mode of cognition, motivation and learning resulting from their home and community socialization.
- the conditions, forces, dynamics of life prevailing in poverty communities – rural, urban slums, tribal settlements and how they influence their behaviour, learning.
- community knowledge and institutions – their rationale and how they can be related with modern knowledge.

Attitudes and values:

- Sensitivity to the problems of the poor, commitment to social justice, zeal for social reconstruction.
- Leadership qualities, organizing abilities, spirit of teamwork, experimental outlook, self-confidence, initiative and innovativeness, self-reliance.

What is given above is a compendium of teacher qualities, skills, attitudes and characteristics that have been found to be instrumental to the success of basic education interventions tried out in the past in difficult learning contexts. It is however in relation to specific teaching-learning contexts that the actual training needs of teachers can be more meaningfully identified. Bold, innovative and context specific approaches are needed to develop these skills, competencies, attitudes and values in teachers.

Illustrative programme frameworks

In this section illustrative programme frameworks for the three major delivery channels of basic education – formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training and continuing education will be presented.

A programme framework for tailoring basic education towards empowerment of the poor should take into consideration a range of parameters involved in the process of effecting social and economic transformation through education. In particular, special note has to be taken of the expanded vision of basic education and its different modes, the diverse population groups which it seeks to serve, their poverty characteristics, the basic learning needs which they entail, the points at which educational interventions are to be made, their general nature and the yardsticks with which to appraise the overall outcome of such a developmental endeavour. Accordingly, the frameworks present in a matrix arrangement programme features, clientele characteristics, learners' poverty profile, implied learning needs and possible programme interventions.

These frameworks are not meant to be read as prescriptive formats for dealing with concrete problems arising in specific situations. They are only configurations intended to help educational decision makers see and appreciate the multiple elements involved in the reorientation of basic education programmes in their mutual relationships. They are intended to stimulate further thinking towards generating ideas and actions as would suit specific contexts.

The frameworks are inspired and informed by the sweep of poverty and basic education. Poverty, as already noted, does not affect only individuals. It hits families, communities and entire nations. Poverty eradication cannot be addressed effectively unless the interrelationships, in a poverty context, among children, youth, adults and the community are understood and appreciated. Educational efforts towards empowering the poor should accordingly address the learning needs of all – children, youth, adults and the entire community – in an integrated manner. As regards basic education, it is not confined to formal schooling alone but encompasses a variety of educational programmes and delivery modes which aim to impart literacy and other basic life skills to children, youth and adults through formal, non formal and informal methods. It is also to be understood that learning is not confined to formal and non formal schooling programmes alone and that learning opportunities exist in many out of school activities – at home, the workplace, the community and in any development oriented action programme.

The elements of the framework

Programme features

The basic education programmes under consideration here are categorised as formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training and continuing education. Broad general features of these programmes with reference to their objectives, design and structure, duration, curriculum and delivery mechanism and mode are outlined under this head. It is quite possible that the actual programmes in different country contexts may exhibit variations in features from the generalised descriptions given here.

Clientele characteristics

The programmes serve children, youth and adults. Clientele characteristics for the different programmes are described with reference to age, socio-economic background, education/literacy status, schooling background and motivation. Here also it is possible that these characteristics may vary across countries.

The profile of poverty groups

Poverty characteristics vary with regions, ethnicity, developmental contexts and are best understood with reference to specific poverty groups. The 'inventory' presented here may aid in understanding the extent to which the nature, degree and kind of characteristics mentioned afflict the poverty population groups. The range of poverty and quality of life indicators considered include literacy, home and family environment, economic status, health and nutrition, gender discrimination, ethnicity, personality factors (characteristics). What is presented here is a generalised profile constructed from the description of the poor available in the different country reports/studies. It is well known that there are wide variations among the poor with respect to ethnicity, minority status (language, religion), habitation (rural, remote villages, urban slums) and culture. The poor differ among themselves both in the kind of characteristics they manifest and their extent and intensity. The description of the poor as given here is a conceptual construct and may not apply in its entirety to any particular poverty group. Ground level actions should be guided by the specific characteristics manifested by identified poverty groups.

Learning needs of the poor

It is with specific reference to learning needs of the poor – basic and life empowering skills, productivity skills and attitudes and values – that basic education interventions should be planned. Again, these learning needs differ according to nature of the learners, age group and motivations.

The learning needs listed here are *implied* learning needs. That is, they are entailed by the manifested poverty characteristics. They are also their empowerment needs. The poor need them to arm themselves to fight the adversities of poverty and seek their full development as human beings. These needs are stated in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values.

Possible interventions

The programmes have to be intervened into at several points and also in an integrated manner. The objectives of poverty eradication and empowerment of the learners should inform all aspects of the programmes – orientation and goals, content and delivery, methods and materials, teacher training, administration, management and community involvement.

Accordingly, actions are suggested with reference to programme visioning and orientation, goals and objectives, contents, organization, delivery, methods, materials and management aspects. The range of possible actions to choose from covers fine-tuning of objectives, reordering priorities, designing poverty group specific curricula, adaptation/adjustment of programme contents (curriculum) by integrating or linking them with poverty issues, review of weightages (instructional/ learning time) for the different learning areas, adoption of activity based and participatory curriculum transaction/strategies, reform of materials and evaluation practices, improvement in the delivery of services and administration and promoting community participation. The actions are suggested at different levels ranging from practical actions to be taken at the classroom/school level to actions at higher levels of policy making, programme planning and execution.

Illustrative Programme Frameworks

Formal Primary Education

Programme features:

It is the main delivery channel outside the family for the basic education of children in all countries.

Primary education is a fundamental human right. Universal primary education is accepted as a strategy for sustainable human development and vigorous efforts are on to ensure universal access, enrolment, participation and learning achievement. Enforced through constitutional and legal enactments. Compulsory in some countries through legislation and generally free.

For most children, it is the only opportunity of formal education. It is the first level of schooling for children in the age group 6-11 or 6-15 depending upon the duration of the primary education cycle which extends over 5 years and beyond up to 8 years.

Curriculum in many countries remains, for the most part, traditional and academically oriented to serve the purposes of education at the secondary and tertiary levels. It is organized around subjects and for the large majority of children who constitute the poor lacks relevance.

It is predominantly a government sector operation with only a small percentage of schools being run by the private sector.

In view of its sweep and reach it possesses tremendous potential to serve as an instrument of poverty eradication/empowerment of the poor.

Clientele served:

Children in the age group 6-11 or 6-15. A large majority attending government run schools come from poverty population groups.

General orientation recommended:

- Organize primary education in terms of its own goals and purposes as a self-contained and self-sustaining programme of fulfilling the basic learning needs of all.
- Impart local and learner group-specificity to curriculum by providing/enhancing enabling provisions and suitable de-regulation.
- Employ pro-active, poverty-focused and gender-sensitive curricular and pedagogical strategies as would enable learners to develop empowering knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values.

Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
Illiterate, semi-literate families, ignorance, lack of access to information, absence of environment conducive to learning, communication within and among family members restricted to basic needs of living, survival.	Basic literacy, numeracy, communication, problem solving skills – to be able to read, write, communicate through speech and writing, solve problems as they arise in daily life, and carry out mathematical operations.	Enhance/strengthen curricular provision (instructional time) for these areas and direct focus on skill development. Adopt innovative, creative and participatory methods built around child activities – plays, games, songs, drama – to teach language and arithmetic. Organize learning in these areas as skill training sessions/workshops. Engage learners in real life encounters through interactive teaching-learning or simulate problem solving situations for them.
	Knowledge, understanding of the physical and social environment.	Organize content around or relate it to development concerns highlighting awareness and affective content.
	Knowledge of basic sciences in the context of life of the poor, their problems and opportunities and access to information and knowledge.	Contextualize teaching and learning through relating it to local occupations, culture, environment, work children do at home, on the farm or other work sites, activities children engage themselves in or outside school.
	Understanding the governance of civic life and development of skills of discussion, decision making and working together for effective participation in community life.	Life orient social studies teaching to the realities of life in the community. Provide opportunities of working in a group, discussion, taking collective decisions, participation in activities related to school life and their learning, mock sessions, role play. Adopt teaching-learning strategies employing debates, discussions, role play, projects, visits to village level organizations, interviews with community leaders.
Economic circumstances: low income and consumption levels, subsistence living, large size families, children share	Awareness about the world of work and participation, under non-exploitative conditions, in production	Reorient/strengthen work experience or work education as a development oriented, production based, problem solving process and ensure its effective implementation. Promote 'earn while

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
work of the family on the farm/other work sites, burden of household work on the girl child, lack of parental interest in education, inability of parents to meet the basic needs of children, remoteness of dwellings.	processes and income generation activities.	you learn'. Have each school adopt a relevant poverty eradication goal (e.g. Removal of illiteracy, improvement in agricultural practices, soil and water conservation, afforestation, effective use of basic services) involving children, parents and community and derive work experience activities from it. Involve local farmers and artisans in teaching work experience. Acknowledge children's out-of-school work experience and their knowledge, skills, attitudes relevant for their survival and support their further refinement and development.
	Learning to use natural and environmental resources intelligently and sustainably.	Emphasise problem solving, creation, invention, socio-economic and cultural value of production, environmental conservation and innovativeness in work experience. Relate curricular inputs with indigenous culture, community knowledge and local technology after due validation and let learners know the how and why of things.
Malnutrition, poor health, proneness to diseases, impaired childhood development, living in unhygienic conditions, hunger, lack of access to and ignorance about the use of basic services. They are children at high risk.	Understanding basic facts, rules, practices relating to health, hygiene, housing, sanitation, nutrition and skills of healthful living.	Set up school as converging point for delivery of basic services. Integrate learning contents in basic services with academic learning and transmit critical messages in health, nutrition and other quality of life aspects. Guide children in developing skills of healthful living through proper use of basic services. Organize demonstrations, presentations, film shows on different aspect of healthful living involving development departments. Design and execute school projects involving community in health, sanitation, conservation, drinking

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
		water supply, improvements in traditional technology.
Gender discrimination within and outside home with reference to child rearing, education, parental expectations, sharing of burden of work.	Awareness and understanding of rights and learning to exercise them.	Introduce Rights Education and have it transacted through dialogues, discussion, role play, study groups and other creative and participatory approaches.
Social, cultural isolation of the family, drunkenness, discordant family relationships, spouse abuse, social backwardness due to ethnicity, minority, refugee status, remoteness, discrimination, exploitation.	Awareness of issues concerning their own lives, the family and the community, manifestations and causes of poverty, developing conviction that poverty can and should be eradicated. Skills of critical thinking, analysing a situation, choosing from alternative courses of action, making informed decisions on matters that affect one's life.	Provide adequate learning space for children in their daily schedule to develop inquisitiveness, curiosity, questioning attitude, initiative, opportunities to test beliefs. Present situations (real life encounters or simulations) and engage them in dialogue, discussions and problem solving. Present instances, success stories, role models, efforts of individuals and communities and their determined fight against poverty undaunted by obstacles.
Low self-esteem, passive acceptance, resignation, fatalism, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation to learn, dependence, lack of cooperation and urge to improve one's lot, lack of ambition.	Developing self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect, positive aspirations in life and overcoming negative attitudes of defeatism, despair, fatalism, superstition, indifference.	Create a caring, encouraging climate in school where learners will not fear failure or punishment, where their even small achievements will be rewarded, where they do not lose heart but persist in their efforts till they succeed. Develop learners capability to manage their own and school affairs. Provide individual tailored projects, assign responsibilities relating to school tasks. Develop school as an institution of empowerment through organizing in-community activities. Value 'strengths' of learners like resilience, survival skills, work skills, knowledge of flora and fauna.

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Non Formal Primary Education

Programme features:

A low cost, alternative channel of basic education to those who are deprived of opportunities of formal schooling. Offers a second chance of learning to the non-enrolled school drop-outs.

Flexible, open ended channel consisting of organized or semi-organized educational activities operating outside the regular structure and routines of the formal school systems. Organized in individual outhouses or in any place available in the area.

Duration varies from 2-3 years and provision exists in some countries for movement from the non formal to an equivalent grade in the formal school system. Covers the whole primary education cycle or to the second/third grade of formal primary schooling with provision for transferability to the equivalent grade in the formal system.

Providers are NGOs as well as governments.

Flexible in design, curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation and easy to redesign to give greater emphasis to poverty concerns. Wider recognition as community level programmes in SA countries.

No fear of formal examination and no home work.

Curriculum stresses basic literacy and numeracy skills and basic knowledge and skills with respect to health, nutrition, sanitation, environment etc.

NFE instructors are adhoc, para professionals, recruited locally from among minimally qualified youth with little or no training.

Clientele served:

Children from the poor in the age group 6-14 years who are not enrolled in schools (either because of non availability of schools or unsuitability of school timings and curriculum to their requirements as working children) and those who have dropped out due to socio-economic compulsions but wish to avail of a second opportunity of learning.

The usual compulsions that keep the children out of school are the necessity of having to help parents with work at home or on the farm or other work sites to support family income.

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General orientation:

Organize NFPE as a flexible, needs-specific educational experience for out-of-school children comparable with the formal system to meet the basic learning needs of out-of-school children and youth and enable them to continue their learning.

Focus objectives on empowerment of learners through pro-active, gender sensitive, curricular and pedagogical strategies with reference to development of basic learning and life skills, productivity skills and attitudes and values.

Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
Illiterate, semi-literate homes, ignorance, lack of access to information, absence of supportive environment at home for learning, communication within and among family members restricted to basic, survival needs of living.	Basic literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving skills: to be able to read, write, communicate through speech and writing, carry out arithmetical operations as are required for day-to-day living.	Organize learning through skill training sessions/workshops, dialogue, use of objects in the environment and practical situations arising in daily life.
	Knowledge of basic sciences in the context of the life of the people, their problems and opportunities and access to information and knowledge.	Organize collective problem solving activities around commonly felt problems. Relate content to development, poverty concerns or work the learners do. Contextualize teaching and learning through relating it to local culture, environment, occupation and work children are engaged in.
	Learning skills and knowledge relevant to continue learning/pursue their education in the formal system.	
Low income and consumption levels, subsistence living, large size families, inability of parents to provide for basic needs of family members, children forced to work on the farms or		Introduce/strengthen productive work and income generation activities as integral and major aspect of the programme. Develop and adopt more functional models of vocational training and income generation activities.

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
do other kinds of work to support family income, burden of household work on the girl child, have no time to spare to attend formal schools.	Enhancing productivity through skill training/ up-grading, income generation skills, entrepreneurship skills, preparation to enter the world of work.	Train/upgrade work skills as needed with reference to new economic opportunities, changes in production processes and occupational patterns and changes in job market (e.g. increase in quantity, quality, variety of yields in agriculture, food preparation, food processing, horticulture).
	Understanding the role of science and technology in daily life and work situations and their application in practice, understanding work-education relationship.	Impart training in skills of sustainable resource generation, management and utilization, use of labour saving techniques, improvement of conditions of work place, reducing tedium of labour, creating a caring environment. Impart training in managerial, entrepreneurial skills and skills with respect to use of credit, cooperatives, marketing, savings. Impart training in understanding the how and why of local technology (making bricks, farm technology) and ways of improving it. Build problem solving and conscientization into productive work and income generation activities.
Malnutrition, poor health, proneness to illness, living in unhygienic conditions, hunger, lack of access to and ignorance about the use of basic services.	Understanding basic facts, rules of health, hygiene, housing, sanitation, nutrition, and about the immediate physical and social world.	Integrate these learnings with literacy training and use of basic services. Transmit critical messages in health, nutrition and other quality of life aspects through learning content of basic services.
	Knowledge of basic services available in the community and skills of making good use of them. Skills of healthful living.	Guide learners in developing skills of healthful living through proper use of basic services. Organize demonstrations, presentations, film shows on different aspects of healthful living involving development departments.
	Understanding the governance of civic life and development of skills	Provide opportunities to develop skills of working in a group, discussion, taking collective decisions, cooperative

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
	of discussion, co-operative decision making for effective participation in community life.	working through debates, group discussion, participation in activities related to their learning, mock sessions, role play.
Gender discrimination within and outside home with respect to child rearing, education, parental aspirations, burden of work sharing, unquestioning acceptance by girls of their subordinate status in home and society due to cultural conditioning, deprivation due to traditional division of occupation as masculine and feminine. Family life: social, cultural isolation of the family, drunkenness, discordant family relationships, social backwardness due to discrimination, exploitation.	Awareness and understanding of rights and learning to exercise them. Awareness of issues concerning their own lives, the family and the community, manifestations and causes of poverty, developing conviction that poverty can and should be eradicated. Skills of thinking critically, analysing a situation, choosing from alternative courses of action, making informed decisions on matters that affect one's life.	Introduce Rights Education – human rights, rights of women, children's rights – as part of curriculum and have it transacted through dialogues, discussion, role play and other creative and participatory approaches. Present situations – dialogue, discussions, problem solving – to help children develop skills of analysis choosing, deciding. Present instances, success stories, role models, efforts of individuals and communities in respect of determined fight against poverty undaunted by obstacles. Create a caring, encouraging climate in school where learners will not fear failure or punishment, where learners' even small achievements will be rewarded, where they do not lose heart but persist in their efforts till they succeed.
Low self-esteem, passive acceptance, resignation, fatalism, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation to learn, dependence, lack of cooperation and urge to improve one's lot, lack of ambition.	Overcoming negative attitudes of defeatism, despair, fatalism, superstition, indifference and developing self-confidence, self-esteem, self-reliance and positive aspirations in life.	Develop learners' capability to manage their own and school affairs by giving them responsibility according to their talents. Provide individual tailored projects, assign responsibilities relating to school tasks. Teachers to visit learners in their houses, on farms, work sites.
Strengths: Cooperative living, survival skills, fighting against natural disasters, initiatives to cope with crises.		Relate curricular learnings to community knowledge, local technology after due validation and let learners know the how and why of things.

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
		Ensure participation of learners in the learning activity – adopt activity, creativity promoting methods – drama, role play, projects. Provide learning space for inquisitiveness, curiosity, questioning attitude, initiative, opportunities to test beliefs. Incorporate identified special 'strengths' of learners like resilience, survival skills, work skills, knowledge of flora and fauna in curricular activities.

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Literacy and Continuing Education

Programme features:

Programme includes basic literacy, post literacy and continuing education.

They are ongoing programmes with established patterns and structures implemented for wider coverage through total literacy campaigns and specific target group programmes.

Duration of literacy training ranges from three to six months to two years. The focus is on acquisition of the basic learning tools of reading, writing and numeracy.

Literacy programmes aim at functional literacy in areas of health, occupation, hygiene, family life, environment, legal rights, women's empowerment, civic consciousness.

Continuing education covers multi-dimensional needs of the learners through a package of educational support services in different media. Objective is to improve quality of life and living standards, increase access to information, development of occupational, management and leadership skills through distance learning, face-to-face training, self-learning.

Continuing education activities include vocational/technical courses, apprenticeship programmes, income generation activities, extension and equivalency education, arts and culture, special programmes such as farmer education, family life education etc., rural libraries, reading centres, self-reliance programmes.

These programmes have high potential to cater to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

These may be the only systematic educational programmes in which the majority of the adult poor participate.

Clientele served:

Illiterate youths/adults in the age range 15-45 years from rural, remote areas, urban slums, ethnic minorities and women constituting a dominant poverty group of labourers, farmers, women, minorities, disadvantaged.

Participants are those who are economically and socially disadvantaged and suffer most directly from poverty.

They are in the economically active age group and constitute a particularly important group for poverty eradication interventions.

Continuing education programmes include neo-literate, semi-literate participants from literacy programmes and also population with limited reading skills.

General orientation:

Organize literacy training as a multiple packages literacy-plus programme located in a social context covering literacy, productivity and conscientization experiences.

Reorient programme contents and processes with reference to changes in occupational patterns, production processes and job market.

Adopt pro-active, gender-sensitive and participatory approaches aimed at empowerment of learners.

Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
Illiteracy (more among women), ignorance, lack of access to information, lack of basic knowledge and skills, lack of ability to communicate, little possibility of knowing and acquisition of new skills, lack of knowledge, skills, attitudes needed for working and living together.	Functional literacy – practical application of literacy skills in relation to meeting basic needs of living like health, food, shelter etc.	Focus training on functional literacy and de emphasize literacy learning for its own sake or as an independent activity. Integrate literacy training with production based/development oriented/ income generation activities/basic needs. Emphasise literacy that conscientize women on gender and socio-economic issues. Focus content of literacy training on issues that are directly concerned with improving life of the people.
	Essential tools of learning – basic literacy, numeracy, communication and problem solving skills: to be able to read, write, communicate through speech and writing, carry out simple arithmetical operations as required in day to day life.	Adopt innovative, creative and participatory methods for teaching literacy-dialogue, discussion, portrait analysis, vocabulary generation, conscientization, skill training workshops. Organize numeracy skill learning through concrete objects in the

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
	Building on and improving their knowledge by making use of continuing education programmes. Skills of accessing information, converting it into useable knowledge and using knowledge to solve problems.	environment and practical situations arising in daily life (in relation to occupation, buying, selling, saving etc.). Make judicious use of community institutions, traditions, cultural transmission processes (festivals, rituals, ceremonies, customs, songs, drama, folklore, stories, symbols, communicating and counting ways, ways of dispensing justice) in curriculum. Involve learners in collective problem solving of issues identified by the group e.g. how shall we increase the yield on farms? How shall we ensure fair prices for our farm produce? Adopt methods that have roots in traditional culture, that promote initiative, participation, creativity, action, reflection, exploration and research.
Economic inability: low productivity, dependence on farm income/ informal sector employment in urban areas, low income, savings, investment, inability to secure nutritional food for healthy living, substandard housing seasonally employed or under/ unemployed small tenant farmers/landless agricultural labourers, under or unemployed slum dwellers from urban areas, lack of technical skills, lack of credit facilities.	Development/upgradation of technological, managerial, resource generation and utilization skills as would help them increase productivity and income with respect to their farm and non farm occupations. Sustainable use of environmental resources and understanding of poverty-environment relationship.	Introduce/strengthen productive work and income generation activities as integral and major aspect of the programme. Emphasise development of women as economic producers through income generating skills without limiting them to feminine traditional skills. Train/upgrade work skills as needed with reference to new economic opportunities, changes in production processes and occupational patterns and changes in job market (e.g. increase in quantity, quality, variety of yields in agriculture, food preparation, food processing, horticulture). Rescue skills of rural women from traditionalism and retool and reskill them. Impart training in skills of sustainable resource generation, management and utilization, use of labour saving techniques, improvement of conditions

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
		of work place, reducing tedium of labour, creating a caring environment. Impart training in managerial, entrepreneurial skills and skills with respect to obtaining credit, processing raw materials, organizing production, finding market outlets, forming cooperatives and introduction of new and appropriate technology. Impart training in understanding the how and why of local technology (making bricks, farm technology) and ways of improving it. Build problem solving and conscientization into productive work and income generation activities.
Malnutrition, poor health, low life expectancy, high incidence of water borne diseases, inability to secure health care and protection from common diseases.	Awareness/understanding of basic facts, rules, practices relating to health, hygiene, housing, sanitation, nutrition and their application in daily life. Skills of using the knowledge in daily life.	Integrate these learnings with literacy training and use of basic services. Build knowledge and understanding of the purposes and provisions of basic services and poverty alleviation schemes and programmes into literacy training.
Lack of access to basic services and low use of them, lack of information about development programmes and ignorance about use of social services of health, nutrition.	Awareness about the various poverty alleviation schemes and programmes, basic services available in the community – health, hygiene, food security, nutrition, credit, co-operatives, savings – knowledge about their provisions and skills of making effective use of them. Understanding the different manifestations of poverty in their lived reality, its root causes and developing the conviction that it can and should be overcome.	Literacy training workers to guide learners in understanding the procedures and availing these services. Promote popular participation in the design and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Learner groups to plan and carry out projects in health, nutrition, sanitation, etc. School/Literacy training centre to play a catalytic role in coordinating with other development departments and organizing cooperative, interactive meetings of literacy training workers, learners and providers of basic services. Organize presentations, demonstrations, film shows in collaboration with concerned development agencies.

Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested Interventions
	Basic awareness of issues concerning their own lives, the family and the community.	Add awareness content and content to generate critical consciousness to literacy training.
Deprivation among women because of intra household, social and legal discrimination, gender discrimination, subjugation to male authority, inhibiting social practices/customs with reference to child rearing, marriage, occupation.	Understanding the various enabling and protective social and economic legislation governing land, labour, property, marriage and skills of making use of them.	Employ dialogue, discussion to help learners analyse their poverty condition and to examine why they are poor, how they can overcome their poverty.
	Being conscious and articulate about their rights as human beings and skills of exercising them.	Organize literacy classes as forum for people to participate as equals and engage themselves with critical issues of their community. Fuse literacy with empowering process.
		Generate awareness about various safeguards, protections given to them and how to make use of them.
Social, cultural isolation, marginalization, alienation, low social position, social backwardness, no part in politics, disenfranchisement.	Understanding the governance of civic life and developing skills of discussion, cooperative decision making for effective participation in community life as active members.	Impart 'rights education' as an integral component of training and organize it around life problems as they arise in concrete contexts-denial of right to admission to school, denial of access to basic services, violation of human rights.
	Organizing themselves for active, equal, responsible participation in society.	Provide training for participation in school life governance, mock sessions, role play around real life, developmental problems of the community.
	Organizing to fight poverty, social discrimination, economic exploitation, gender discrimination, restrictive social customs and practices relating to child rearing, occupation, marriage, education etc.	Adopt teaching-learning strategies built around debates, discussions, role play.
	Skills of analysing a situation, thinking critically, choosing from	Cooperatively plan with the learners the programme of literacy training and its day-to-day conduct. Organize earning around individual and group projects with learners sharing responsibilities, working in a group, taking collective, cooperative and constructive actions.

Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
	alternative courses of action, making informal decisions on matters that affect one's life, making proper use of legal and other services to redress their suffering.	Have learners identify a common cause of the community – developmental projects, demand generation for better basic services, education, non availability of drinking water, exploitation by vested interests, social problems related to drinking, dowry, child marriage, official apathy to their grievances, etc. – and learn skills of organization. Bring together women in groups around a common cause, issue, need so that they can look critically at issues and organize themselves for collective action. Make appropriate use of indigenous culture-local history, geography, folklore forms like songs, drama, games, dance, proverbs, riddles, popular poetry – to transmit messages with critical significance and potential for learning.
Personality profile: Low self-esteem, passive acceptance, resignation, fatalism, lack of self-confidence and unwillingness to learn, contentment with what one has, no urge to improve their lot, reluctance to assert their rights and take an active role, dependence, unroganized, don't know how to work collectively, cooperatively.	**Overcoming negative attitudes of defeatism, despair, fatalism, superstition, and becoming self-confident, self-reliant, and enhancing one's self-esteem.**	Provide learning situations for learners to question, to find out, to analyse, to choose, to decide, to create, to take action on their own with reference to various activities in relation to their life as learners. – finishing an incomplete dialogue, completing an unfinished story, interpreting the contents of a picture, rewriting a story in a positive way, substituting negative responses by positive ones, etc. Involve learners in situations to critically examine their own beliefs and attitudes and how they would respond to diverse situations through empathy exercises, free expression strategy, alienation techniques, imaginative juxtaposition, conse-quences of a hypothetical situation etc. Simulate real life situations and provide opportunities for role play by learners. Provide instances from the lives of famous individuals who had to go

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Poverty profile of learners	Implied learning needs	Suggested interventions
		through the sufferings of poverty and how they stood up against and fought the damaging and destructive effects of poverty to make a mark of their own – sagas from the lives of great individuals, stories, biographies could provide hope and inspiration to learners placed in similar situations. Create an encouraging and caring climate where learners will not fear failure, or punishment, where even their small achievements will be rewarded, where they do not lose heart if they fail but keep trying till they succeed. Literacy training workers and other functionaries to visit learners in their homes, on farms, work sites. Build learning experiences/activities on community knowledge and local technology, after due validation, to help them understand the 'how' and 'why' of things as well as acquire empowering knowledge. Introduce scientific literacy components to develop scientific awareness and attitude and ability to participate in decision making on politico-scientific issues and policies that affect their lives. Coordinate efforts of school with those of social activists in fighting superstition, promotion of scientific outlook through demonstrations, lectures etc. Incorporate identified special abilities and characteristics of learners like resilience, survival skills, work skills, knowledge of flora and fauna in curricular activities.

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Chapter 4

FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Drawing from the analysis of the poverty and basic education situation in the Asia-Pacific context and the programme perspective on directing the thrusts of basic education towards empowerment of the poor in this chapter the concern will be with the action implications of the various proposals emerging from the study. First general as well as programme specific implications will be presented. This will be followed by a listing of specific actions to be taken under key action areas and an outline of modalities for inter-country collaborative support.

Implications for Action

Tailoring basic education towards issues of poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor demands determined action on several important fronts. While some of these cut across the different programmes of basic education, others are specific to particular programmes although the distinction is by no means absolute. Also, there are actions to be taken by national level decision makers and executives as well as others to be taken by professionals at various levels. The discussion of the many aspects of basic education in relation to eradication of poverty and empowerment of the poor has indicated the rationale of these actions, the principles that inform them as well as their substantive content. This section brings together the various action suggestions – general actions that cut across programmes as well as programme specific actions and presents concise statements of them. It is to be noted here that action in one area would have implication on other action area thus making it imperative that singular action in a particular area might not be able to make significant impact in terms of empowering the poor.

General actions

1. Decentralize functioning of all ministries and departments concerned with development planning and administration

Decentralization of educational planning and management down to the village/habitation level accompanied by devolution of authority, financial and executive power is a line of action for educational reform that has already been accepted by most countries in principle. Decentralization is advocated to make the community responsible for the basic education of its people and eventually build a sense of ownership of the educational arrangements made to extend basic education to different clientele groups. The decentralization in the education sector should be accompanied by a similar process in the other development ministries and departments.

Decentralizing the curriculum planning process is also needed in order to design/adapt and implement curricula that are particularly responsive to the living and learning needs of identified poverty groups. The active involvement and participation of the major stake holders in this enterprise, namely, the community of the poor, is a precondition for the success of this venture. The decentralization of teacher recruitment and administration of projects at community level would further support the active participation of the community and contribute to their empowerment.

2. Ensure coordinated functioning of all development departments

Several development ministries and departments are involved in poverty eradication like agriculture, health, family welfare, rural and tribal development, youth services, child welfare in addition to education. The characteristics and problems of the poor and the learning needs deriving from them are diverse and rich and cris-cross over a wide range of development services and programmes. A synergistic alliance on the part of all who are concerned with development and their concerted and coordinated action is an absolute must for the various development services to converge on poverty and make a dent on it. Adjustments and adaptations of basic education programmes to poverty eradication goals will yield the maximum benefits only when such a collaborative and cooperative developmental context is created. Decentralization is essential to the establishment of such a context.

3. Enlarge support base for early child development programmes

Children are the ones most affected by poverty. The damages that poverty can cause to the normal, healthy growth of the child can have a lasting effect on its personality and may be irreversible in later years. The early years of the child are critical from the point of view of the development of intelligence, personality and social behaviour.

The state should accept the responsibility for early childhood development which includes the provision of health and nutrition care for mothers and children and the education of pre-school age children. While health services have necessarily to be provided by the state, the state may encourage communities to establish their own services for mothers and children. Existing community health and pre-school programmes may be supported in a variety of ways such as training of community health workers and pre-school teachers, development of materials for use at community level and support through state media. Communities may be given incentives to develop their own pre-schools by making available land, giving a subsidy for putting up a building, giving an outright grant, etc.

4. Combat feminization of poverty

Women by all counts are the worst sufferers and victims of poverty, along with their children. Gender discrimination in education, in social roles, occupational choice, and in economic and other spheres of activity both accounts for and enhances the misery of their poverty. Basic education in its war against poverty should target women and girls and fight entrenched attitudes that account for the subjugation of women. It should also pave the way for the real empowerment of women by making them socially and economically self-reliant through developing their productive capabilities and enhancing their overall capacity for full participation in all fields. The association of femininity with poverty has to be broken. In this effort particular attention may be directed to marginalised groups.

5. 'Work orient basic education'

Productive work is not to be understood here in its usual economic sense where it is meant for adults. Children cultivating a school garden or making a broom which may really be used are examples of engaging in productive work. Such work may be done without exploiting children. Productive work as an organizing principle of curriculum adds to the value of basic education programmes with their emphasis on empowerment and eradication of poverty. Work need not necessarily be mechanical and non-creative. Scientific and technological development which can improve the quality of life of the poor rarely reach them. Development oriented and production based work experience may be a way of transferring such knowledge in an assimilable manner. It can also bring out the creativity and inventiveness of the people and make basic education more purposive and enjoyable.

6. Develop school as an institution of community empowerment

Where schools exist, particularly in rural and remote areas, the maximum use should be made of the human and physical resources associated with the school. The school should be transformed into a community asset and an institution for the empowerment of the community. This calls for an expanded role for the school, provision of more facilities to it and a re-training of the school staff. The decentralization and coordination referred to above would support the development of rural schools in this manner. Among the many possibilities are that a school may take up specific projects in health, sanitation, nutrition, prevention of environmental degradation, improvements in traditional technology. It should also be possible for community development groups to make use of the school facilities.

7. Integrate basic services with basic education at the community level

Several development ministries and departments are involved in the task of providing services to the poor such as in health, family welfare, rural and tribal development, youth services, child welfare, agriculture in addition to education. The decentralization and coordination of the work of these agencies has already been referred to. An outcome of such action would be the integration of services in areas such as health and agriculture with basic education. For example, the learning content in the basic services of health, food, nutrition, agriculture could be exploited to give point and purpose to literacy training, adult education and primary school learning. The poor will value and are more likely to participate in education if it is made immediately useful to them.

8. Organize primary education to serve the needs of all children

Different categories of children are entitled to basic education. Some who are entitled do not receive it. Some others who receive it do not benefit from it because their particular needs and circumstances have not been considered in the design and implementation of the programmes. The formal primary education in most countries is designed and implemented mainly as a foundation for the secondary ignoring the needs of many who do not go to the secondary stage. To the extent that non formal primary education attempts to direct children back into the formal primary, it is also not catering adequately to those for whom a primary stage is terminal. Basic education for children should be designed and implemented to meet the learning needs of all children and not some only.

Actions in relation to Formal Primary Schooling

The sweep of primary education, its potential for empowering the poor, the distortions which it presently suffers from and the qualitative transformation which it needs to undergo to shape as the cutting edge have already been referred to. The official curriculum in all countries reflect many of the principles enunciated above. What acts against the interests of the poor is its non observance in actual curricular practice. In the process critical learning areas having to do with skill learning, attitude building and personality development suffer the most as they do not enjoy the same status in examination as book learning. Curricular intentions should get translated into practice at the ground level in letter and spirit and this calls for institution of actions of various kinds and at different levels. The goal should be to establish formal primary schooling as an autonomous, self-contained and self-sufficient educational experience for fulfilling the basic learning needs of all. Towards this end, the following action areas are indicated.

1. Affirm empowerment of the poor as a major goal

Primary education should be organized in terms of its own goals and purposes to fulfil the basic learning needs of all without concentrating only on preparing children for the next level of education as frequently happens now. These needs should be explicitly and boldly reflected in its objectives, content and processes. *Poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor should be acknowledged as a priority concern.* Such unambiguous expression of the intent and purpose will help in triggering creative responses towards establishing primary schooling as an effective channel of basic education.

2. Strengthen curriculum towards empowerment

a) Enhance poverty sensitivity of contents

Poverty sensitivity can be imparted to curriculum contents in different subjects by addressing specific poverty issues, relating content to developmental projects, including poverty facts in the treatment of health, nutrition, environment etc., adding affective content, enlarging explanations by citing the poverty factor, acknowledging indigenous knowledge, culture, skills and so on. (See pp. 104-108).

b) Integrate learning components of basic services in curriculum

The basic services of health and nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, food security, family welfare etc. provide plenty of opportunities to develop relevant knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes in children which are useful to all of them. (See pp. 78-79).

c) Prioritize content/learning areas with reference to empowerment needs

It may be worthwhile to look into the various "subjects" of the curriculum, the learning time (curriculum time) given to them and their status as examination subjects and examine whether a re-ordering of priorities is called for. *In deciding curricular priorities, for example, whether language learning, work experience, arithmetic, or environmental education should be given more time or greater emphasis, the empowerment needs of the learners should have a decisive say.* Action for prioritisation can be initiated at national level, regional level and local level. Emphasis should be on fulfilling the empowerment needs of the children.

d) Introduce additional inputs

It may be necessary to introduce additional inputs into the curriculum by way of learning units, courses, projects without necessarily adding to its load. Examples of such inputs may be: Rights Education, Health and Nutrition Education, Work Education. Again, these have to be thought of in relation to the specific, empowerment needs of learners.

3. Reorient primary school pedagogy towards empowerment learning

Passive rote learning and authoritarian methods which characterize teaching-learning in typical primary schools do not promote self-confidence nor do they help children to question, to find out, to seek explanations and to do things which promote the qualities to be developed in the children. *Teaching for empowerment of the poor calls for the adoption of a pedagogy that treats learning as an encounter with reality and engages learners in a dialogue and puts them at the centre of choosing, deciding and acting on matters that affect their lives.* Learning has to be promoted through practical illustrations and activities and projects involving wholehearted participation of children. Certain participatory learning processes are Problem-posing/Problem-solving, Problem-based learning, Brainstorming, Group discussion, Peer group learning, Critical thinking/Critical analysis, Experiential learning, Small group discussion, etc. However, there cannot be a single format of any learning process. The main thrust is that children should be at the centre of the process.

4. Allow flexible curriculum planning and implementation at the school level

Formal primary curriculum continues to remain rigid and inflexible due to its centralized character. *Suitable deregulation is needed to empower schools and teachers to adapt curriculum to local specifics.* The minimum that is necessary to make it relevant to local realities is to provide and increase enabling provisions for schools and teachers to make appropriate adjustments. Another approach, which is already being experimented in many countries, is to lay down only generic learning outcomes with freedom given to schools and teachers to choose content and methods as appropriate to the local context. It may also be necessary to introduce additional inputs into the curriculum or adjust certain inputs to make them context and empowerment needs – specific without necessarily overloading it.

5. Reorient teachers, trainers and administrators

Practice of empowerment pedagogy calls for teacher capacity building and the creation of a strong supportive context. It also calls for corresponding reorientation in the approaches to training of teachers, appraisal of teacher performance and administration of primary education.

Teacher training has to be made contextual with reference to the learning needs of children from poverty groups. This would mean building teacher capabilities with reference to understanding the learning needs and styles of poverty group children and creatively responding to them. They also need to be equipped with the skill of developing curriculum and materials to integrate local needs with the core curriculum. Even more important is the need to develop in the teachers attitudes and values that commit them to the cause of the poor and approach their task as a mission. The kind of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values that teachers may need in promoting empowerment learning are illustrated in pp. 114-116.

The need to reorient basic education towards poverty eradication and the concerns of empowerment pedagogy should also duly inform and shape the training of trainers as well as educational supervisors, administrators and managers. The convergence of developmental efforts towards poverty eradication and especially the coordinated functioning of basic services and basic education calls for educators to work hand in hand with their counterparts in other development sectors. The training of these functionaries will have to be a multidisciplinary exercise involving experts from all concerned development sectors. *The creation of a context where trainers, educational administrators and supervisors are able to work in concert with teachers at the ground level is most essential for the practice of empowerment pedagogy.*

6. Provide and adopt pro-active teaching-learning materials

Children need basic learning materials including printed materials, that attract them, induce in them the desire to learn, inform them, awaken them and make them think and act. Producing such materials that carry the message of creative teaching and learning is a long evolutionary process. The efforts should continue with greater vigour. Adequate and appropriate teaching-learning materials are required to be furnished to the children of formal primary education programmes with a view to contextualise teaching and learning through relating it to local culture, environment, occupation and the work the children or their families are engaged in. Materials transmitting essential messages in health, nutrition and other quality of life aspects should be made available both to teachers and children.

Actions in relation to Non Formal Primary Education

Under the broad rubric of non formal education a wide range and variety of programmes are offered in the countries of the region to cater to diverse learning needs of children, youth and adults. The concern here is with non formal primary education (NFPE) which caters to children who are out of school for various reasons. NFPE provides such children a second chance for basic education and an opportunity to continue their education further in the formal system. The clientele for NFPE are all poor and the bulk of them are working children. NFPE has, therefore, a special role to play in poverty eradication. Orienting on-going NFPE programmes towards empowerment of the poor under the prevailing situation would have to be preceded by strong actions towards establishing the credibility of NFPE as a genuine alternative to quality primary education. This requires, among other considerations, that NFPE curricula be specifically designed with the particular learners in mind. This flexibility is a defining characteristic of non formal education and should be adhered to. The further actions required to fine tune NFPE towards empowerment may be as follows:

1. Affirm empowerment of the poor as a major goal

Non formal primary education should be organized in terms of goals and purposes to fulfil the basic learning needs of all out of school children. These needs should be explicitly and boldly reflected in its objectives. *Poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor should be acknowledged as a priority concern of NFPE.* Unambiguous expression of this intention and purpose will help in triggering creative responses towards establishing non formal primary schooling as an effective channel of basic education.

2. Direct programme thrusts on empowerment

Proper review and analysis of existing programmes are required to *widen coverage and sharpen focus on poverty issues, accommodate impact of new technologies on development, establish better relationship between learning and work, develop productivity skills, attitudes, organization and quality of life enhancing skills.* The actions suggested for formal primary education to direct the focus of curriculum on poverty eradication concerns – enhancing poverty sensitivity of contexts, including learning components of basic services, prioritizing content areas, introduction of additional inputs – apply to NFPE as well.

3. Reorient NFPE pedagogy

Empowerment pedagogy as already described treats learning as an encounter with reality and seeks to *"arm" learners with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as would give them a sense of internal strength and confidence to take control of their lives.*

Pedagogy skills among NFPE instructors should be enhanced through short duration, on-site, skill-specific training programmes, so that they can make learning contextual. Specific emphasis should be given on organizing learning through using objects in environment and practical situations arising in daily life and problem solving activities. The principles that should inform teaching and learning and the different participatory learning processes are already described with reference to formal primary education.

4. Comprehensively review issues of duration and equivalence

This issue needs to be looked into from different angles: adequacy to do justice to the objectives of basic education especially skill development in critical areas, strengthening of poverty focus in NFPE and the curricular adaptations and adjustments it may entail, the qualitative difference in the learning experiences provided in the two streams, the differences in school practices etc. Using the yardstick of formal primary schooling to compare learner achievements in the two delivery channels, on the face of it, seems untenable. It would also be worthwhile looking into the extent to which NFPE has helped children to continue their learning beyond the basic stage.

5. Train facilitators

While most NFPE facilitators (teachers, instructors) would have had the experience of dealing with poor children, they need re-training considering the shift in the objectives towards the empowerment of learners. *A major change required from the facilitators is a change of attitude towards the learners, their families and the communities they come from.* The facilitators should have confidence in them, recognize their strengths as well as weaknesses and believe in their potential to overcome their present circumstances. Apart from this they should also acquire the capability to adapt and transact the curriculum to fit the circumstances of the children. Changes in the pedagogy required have already been referred to.

In recruiting facilitators it is best to recruit from the local environment so that they have authentic knowledge of the community in which they are to work. The pre-service training of these facilitators should also, among other considerations, focus on poverty eradication and empowerment. Its duration and content should be reviewed in the light of the reorientation of NFPE towards poverty eradication.

6. Provide and adopt proactive teaching-learning materials

Adequate and appropriate teaching-learning materials are required to be furnished to the children of non formal primary education programmes with a view to contextualise teaching and learning through relating it to local culture, environment, occupation and work the children or their families are engaged in. Materials transmitting essential messages in health, nutrition and other quality of life aspects should be made available both to teachers and children.

It is essential that NFPE be given the same status as FPE. The teachers and students in NFPE classes should have as good learning materials and resources as in FPE. This by no means implies that the material and resources have to be the same. In general they would be different. But children in NFPE should not be unjustly discriminated in this regard.

Actions in relation to Literacy and Continuing Education

In countries where illiteracy continues to be a major problem, functional literacy programmes of diverse designs are being implemented targeting illiterate youth and adults in the age group 15-35/40. The campaign approach adopted in many countries involves mass mobilization, environment building and participatory planning and takes the form of a peoples' movement towards total literacy. Although achieving minimum predetermined levels of literacy and numeracy is the main goal, the programmes in their objectives encompass wider developmental concerns also like health, nutrition, environment, population education, women's empowerment and so on. There are also post-literacy and continuing education programmes serving a variety of learning needs of neo-literates and others. Although 'development' is stated to be the major concern of all these programmes, at the ground level it has been found that they are conducted essentially as "educational" programmes and poverty eradication is addressed if at all only marginally. The situation calls for action on several fronts. These include:

1. Affirm empowerment as a major objective

Literacy training and continuing education should be organized to fulfil the basic learning needs of all illiterate youth and adults without concentrating only on imparting to them basic literacy and numeracy and offering some information on 'functional skills'. Meeting the basic learning needs of these group of people and poverty eradication and improvement of their quality of life should be explicitly and boldly reflected in the objectives of literacy and continuing education programmes. Unambiguous expression of such intention and purpose will help in triggering creative responses towards establishing literacy and continuing education as an effective channel of basic education.

2. Direct programme emphasis on development and poverty eradication concerns

Proper review and analysis of existing programmes are required to widen coverage and sharpen focus on poverty issues, accommodate impact of new technologies on development, establish better relationship between learning and work, develop productivity skills, attitudes, organization and quality of life enhancing skills. The actions suggested for formal and non formal primary education to direct the focus of curriculum on poverty eradication concerns apply *mutatis mutandis* to programmes of literacy training and continuing education as well. In sum and substance, the major qualitative interventions needed are: *linking literacy learning with economic life of the poor, integrating basic services with content and processes of adult education, emphasising attitude and organization building and adopting innovative approaches to train literacy skills.*

3. Reorient teaching-learning methods

Instead of traditional rote learning, opportunities should be provided for learners to interact, to analyse information to understand their poverty situations and to apply knowledge in practical life. The principles of empowerment pedagogy already described should inform and guide teaching-learning practices in literacy training and continuing education programmes.

4. Integrate literacy training and continuing education programme with formal and non formal primary education

Literacy and continuing education would gain most by adopting the integrated approach to the planning of basic education services at the community level. Essentially it involves organizing the curriculum of primary, non formal and adult education programmes around a common core of identified poverty concerns of the community and ensuring their pursuit by all the three channels in a coordinated and convergent manner. See pp. 82-83.

5. Provide better infrastructure support

Literacy training programmes have suffered for want of adequate infrastructure. The typical environment of a literacy class as already observed is depressing, drab and demotivating. *Literacy and continuing education needs infrastructure support in a big way.*

6. Train literacy workers

Presently literacy workers are drawn from local youth. While they have knowledge of the community they may not posses any special qualifications or skills to effectively address their task. Their job demands a variety of competencies and skills as already described. *Training designs for equipping literacy workers with the necessary skills should be developed and tried out on a large scale to evolve effective and economical models of training.* The existing literacy workers need to be re-trained.

7. Provide proactive teaching-learning materials

The need of attractive and good quality books for literacy students and neo-literates that induce in them the desire to learn; inform and awaken them and make them to think and act is yet to be fulfilled in many countries. Also literacy workers and learning mediators need a new generation of teaching-learning materials that offer practical help to them in translating curricular intentions in actual learning settings.

In-country follow-up actions in key areas

The real test of the programme perspective presented in the preceding chapter lies in the nature and kind of action responses it would trigger in the countries of the region, the feedback these actions would generate and the degree and extent to which it fuels national efforts towards the continual renewal of basic education programmes and processes towards empowerment of the poor. In the previous section the broad action implications of the various general and programme-specific strategies proposed in this regard were outlined. More specific and micro-level intervention suggestions with reference to objectives, content and methodologies of different basic education programmes are also indicated in the illustrative programme frameworks. Deriving from these in this section examples of specific actions which may be launched under key areas are given below.

Renewal of programme contents and processes

a) Carry out in-depth review and analysis of content, methods and materials of ongoing basic education programmes with reference to their reorientation towards poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor.

b) Prioritize/reorient/fine-tune objectives of basic education programmes towards empowerment.

c) Undertake needs assessment of different poverty group learners with a view to identify critical life concerns and learning needs and integrate them with curriculum contents, materials and methods.

d) Design curricula, courses, learning units and curricular materials incorporating empowerment needs of learners and focusing on integration of basic learning and life skills with productive work and empowerment.

e) Introduce suitable deregulation to curriculum planning and implementation and examination practices to enable teachers and schools to design/adapt curriculum to specific needs of learner groups and contextualize it with community knowledge, local technology, cultural life and environment.

f) Strengthen programme contents with the infusion of empowerment learning areas like Rights Education, Work Education, Attitude and Value building activities.

g) Reorient basic education pedagogy towards learner empowerment by emphasising participatory, problem solving activities built around critical life concerns.

h) Integrate work/productivity skills and income generating activities relevant to application of modern science and technology for development in all basic education programmes.

i) Organize evaluation of learner achievement and teacher performance with reference to attainment of empowerment knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values.

Orientation of teachers and other functionaries

Orient functionaries (teachers, facilitators, trainers, supervisors, administrators) as appropriate to their main functions with reference to the following competencies and skills:

a) Skills required to work effectively with the local community and for their development.

b) Understanding of the characteristics, culture, knowledge, and living conditions of poverty groups and their special strengths with reference to learning.

c) Skills required for effective interaction, partnership and networking with programmes of various development sectors.

d) Skills required for organizing and facilitating participatory learning, integrating learning with productive work and methods and techniques of empowerment pedagogy.

e) Methods of assessment of learning with reference to attainment of empowerment objectives.

f) Organizing learning sequences around critical life concerns of the poor towards their empowerment, and developing local specific teaching-learning materials.

Promoting community partnerships

a) Evolve participatory methods and strategies for ensuring community ownership of basic education and other development programmes.

b) Utilize community knowledge, resources and activities to build a support base for programmes of basic education towards poverty eradication.

c) Ensure participation of communities and specifically the poor in overseeing and carrying out needs assessments and formulation of programmes, implementation and monitoring.

d) Develop intra and inter-community partnerships to strengthen linkages with and among relevant agencies and to implement actions on the ground.

Linkages with development Ministries and Departments

a) Establish mechanisms for collaborative planning of development programmes among Ministries and Departments to support basic education for poverty eradication.

b) Promote and forge implementation linkages between development programmes of different Ministries and Departments at local level.

c) Harness and use the media as an effective tool for sensitising various stakeholders including the civic society, people at the grassroots and policy level people about the importance of linkages between basic education and poverty eradication.

d) Share/exchange the expertise and resources/facilities of basic education and vice versa among various agencies and partners.

e) Ensure coordination among various training programmes and offer more integrated training programmes at community level.

f) Organize coordinated programmes of teacher orientation and training at community level.

g) Coordinate with various agencies the preparation and use of teaching-learning materials and other related work at the local level.

h) Ensure that extension materials prepared by various development agencies support basic education for poverty eradication.

Policy advocacy and sensitisation

a) Promote dialogue at various levels of planning and technical preparation on reorienting basic education towards poverty eradication and empowerment of the poor.

b) Generate debate and mobilize public opinion on reorienting basic education programmes towards poverty eradication. Utilize media.

c) Oversee the preparation and development of macro-micro level plans and projects and programmes.

d) Pool together, earmark and allocate financial and other resources required for the initiation of basic education programmes with focus on poverty eradication and empowerment.

Monitoring and evaluation

Continual monitoring and evaluation of actions to reorient basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor is necessary to track the progress of implementation and attainment of empowerment learning outcomes by children, youth and adults served by the programmes. Monitoring and evaluation should focus on:

a) Linkages with development programmes of other Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

b) Curriculum adaptation and reorientation.

c) Recruitment of teachers/facilitators.

d) Preparation of teachers/facilitators and other functionaries involved in organizing/facilitating basic education programmes.

e) Community partnership and action areas.

f) Teaching-learning methodologies towards empowerment.

g) Learners' involvement and their roles in the learning process.

h) Attainment of empowerment knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and values by learners.

Inter-country collaborative support – Modalities

The gravity of the poverty situation in the Asia-Pacific region – the large scale incidence of absolute poverty in many countries of the region, the increasing income disparities between the poor and the non poor in countries which are otherwise registering impressive economic growth and their overall consequences on the social, economic, cultural and political life of the people – calls for collective, cooperative and determined action on the part of all countries to intensify their fight against poverty. In particular, it draws attention to the urgent need for such action in directing the thrusts of basic education, which has, by and large, remained marginal to poverty eradication and developmental efforts. The creation of such a cooperative and collaborative context for reengineering basic education towards poverty eradication seems inevitable considering the commonalties that characterize the poverty situations and basic education systems in the region. Towards facilitating such inter-country cooperation and development of a collaborative and mutually supportive context, the following modalities for inter-country cooperative action are suggested.

1. Inter-country technical fora on basic education for poverty eradication

The fora will bring together experts and key decision makers in the areas of educational policy planning, curriculum, teacher training and other aspects of basic education and other development departments to discuss common problems, share experiences and explore ways and means of effecting closer linkages between basic education programmes and poverty eradication in the participating countries. Specifically the fora will address the following areas:

- ☐ Share country perceptions on development policies, poverty eradication programmes and strategies and policies and objectives of basic education vis-a-vis poverty eradication.
- ☐ Explore strategic interventions to direct the thrust of basic education programmes toward empowerment objectives and offer appropriate technical and policy advice for key decision makers on the designing and initiation of various interventions including the use of media.
- ☐ Explore approaches to deal with difficult intervention areas like ensuring coordinated and collaborative functioning of all development departments with basic education and their convergence on eradication of poverty, decentralization of educational planning and management with appropriate devolution of authority and power to the community and creating a supportive context for basic education to function as an instrument of social change.
- ☐ Review progress of implementation of the programme with reference to actions initiated, the functioning of interventions at different levels and evaluation of results achieved.
- ☐ Share experiences acquired at the country level for mutual benefit especially in critical areas like attacking feminization of poverty, integration of basic skills learning with productive work and empowerment and sensitisation and capability building of educational functionaries at different levels.

The fora will function through periodic working group meetings, high level conferences and seminars, workshops as appropriate to the agenda being addressed. These meetings will be backed up by well-designed, relevant technical/research studies on different agenda items.

2. Pilot projects

As the overall goal of the programme is to influence the basic education systems of the countries as a whole over a long range of time pilot projects should be designed in such a way that their outcomes are easily assimilated and absorbed by the larger system and shared and disseminated among participating countries. In view of the wide range of diversity that exists among poverty groups and in view of the culture specific nature of the interventions proposed, piloting acquires special significance. Pilot projects are essentially action research projects. They are to be pilot both in the sense of delimited operation with respect to specified areas (for example, identified poverty groups sharing common characteristics like rural, landless labourers, urban squatter settlement populations, groups of poor communities, villages, transforming the small rural school located in difficult areas) as well as identified interventions (for example, integrating income generating skills in NFPE and literacy training programmes, establishing the school as an empowering institution).

Keeping in view the diversity of poverty groups to be addressed and the kind of interventions to be tried out, a country may carry out a number of pilot projects. The thrust of these projects should be on research as well as the trialling of planned interventions under controlled conditions with a view to demonstrate the impact and to facilitate their eventual absorption in the wider system.

3. Inter-country interaction and sharing of experiences

The inter-country exchange programme would provide for exchange, among participating countries, of a wide range and variety of experiences in reorienting basic education programmes toward poverty eradication. Specifically, the exchange programme would cover:

- ☐ Exchange of information and experiences with regard to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategic interventions, methods and materials;
- ☐ Exchange of basic education personnel with ground level experience and expertise in critical areas like integrating income generation activities, skill training/upgrading of rural poor in literacy training and NFPE programmes, empowerment pedagogy, innovative and creative approaches to literacy skills training;

- Field study visits to project action sites with a view to facilitate in-depth review/study of change processes initiated and managed;
- Dialogues and interactions with those involved at different levels in initiating the changes, from key decision makers at the policy level and national experts to ground level workers like community leaders, teachers, facilitators.

4. Joint research

There is a great need for collaborative research among participating countries on basic education and poverty eradication. The researches could be status studies, correlational studies, analytical research, field studies adopting ethnographic research methods, case studies and comparative research. Of particular significance to the project will be the following areas:

- Status study of poverty and basic education situation in the country.
- Development of indicators of empowerment.
- Effects of literacy training/basic education on indicators of empowerment and social well being.
- Study of community knowledge, culture, ethno science and local technology and their validation with reference to their integration into basic education curriculum.
- Study of characteristics of the poor including their special strengths with a view to identify appropriate empowerment needs and design strategic interventions.
- Impact study of poverty focused interventions in the areas of basic literacy and life skills, productivity skills, attitudes and values.
- Impact study of community involvement, teaching-learning methods on empowerment.

☐ Case studies of innovative/experimental projects on action sites – primary schools, non formal education centres and literacy training workshops – for possible replication and wider dissemination of experiences.

Joint research could involve networking arrangements and cooperative planning, designing, instrumentation and evaluation techniques to facilitate smooth dissemination of research findings, information and sharing of experiences. Collaborative research among countries should have as its main purpose the provision of research back up to the programme at all stages – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It should therefore focus on such studies and carry them out in such a way that the research findings readily feed into policies, programmes and practices. They should suitably inform and guide the various project interventions at different points. Secondly as educational interventions towards poverty eradication are context and culture specific, collaborative research should throw light on the specific manner and conditions under which different interventions will be effective.

5. Inter-country cooperation on the use of media and information technology

Media can come in as a very powerful ally for basic education efforts directed towards poverty eradication. Media can function both as an instrument of basic education in its own right as well as the channel for informing and educating people about the role of basic education in poverty eradication. Some of the areas where media can serve to inform people are basic education and its purpose, how basic education can contribute towards poverty eradication, the role of the community in planning and managing basic education, basic education and its relation with basic services. Even more importantly media can, in its own right, function as a channel for communicating empowering knowledge, skills, attitudes, values. It can also be a powerful instrument for the training of functionaries of basic education at different levels through demonstration of good techniques, practices, role models.

Inter-country cooperation in the deployment of the media can take many forms. Core messages on basic education and poverty eradication could be commonly identified, shared and disseminated among the people of countries concerned. Media intervention in different areas of curriculum, teacher training and general themes of basic education could be shared among countries. Media programmes in critical areas also can be prepared in a collaborative arrangement among countries. A common, dedicated channel for basic education intervention towards poverty eradication would bring the countries closer in their fight against poverty. The technical fora of key persons could offer advise to the countries on the development and implementation of a cooperative agenda on media deployment.

Information technology can be brought in to create a data-base on poverty and basic education and also to monitor and appraise periodically the progress of the project.

6. In-country and inter-country cooperative meetings

In-country arrangements for the planning, implementation and appraisal of the programme of reorientation of basic education programmes may take the form of setting up of appropriate advisory, executive and coordination bodies involving both basic education and other development departments. There will also be meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops on specific themes both at the national and sub-national levels. These mechanisms are intended to deal with substantive issues of programme implementation in pilot sites and also later in the larger system. The actual character of reorientation of basic education programmes towards poverty eradication – the nature of interventions to be made, strategies and approaches of curriculum renewal and teacher orientation, evaluation of processes and outcomes – will be shaped through the deliberations of these mechanisms.

Inter-country cooperative and collaborative meetings would focus on mutual sharing of experiences, generation of innovative approaches and strategies in relation to substantive programme interventions and reporting of successes and difficulties. These meetings would link with the technical fora deliberations and facilitate inter-country dialogue among basic education workers more directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes. Country focal points of nodal institutions/ individuals will have to be identified to facilitate communication among countries in this regard.

Summing up

Basic education programmes – formal primary schooling, non formal primary education and literacy training and continuing education – suitably reoriented can make definitive contributions towards empowerment of the poor. These contributions mainly relate to development of basic learning and life skills, enhancement of productivity, building of positive attitudes and values and raising of consciousness for triggering creative responses to combat poverty. The reorientation initiatives needed towards this end include: affirmation of empowerment as a major objective of all basic education programmes, strengthening of programme contents and their reorganization towards empowerment objectives, adoption of pro-active, poverty-focused and gender-sensitive approaches in teaching-learning methods and materials and orientation of teachers and learning facilitators in empowerment pedagogy. These interventions into programme elements must be backed up by general action strategies like enlarging the support base for early child development, empowerment of women and girls, 'work orientation' of basic education, integration of basic services with basic education, decentralization of educational planning and management, developing the school as an institution of community empowerment and shaping primary education as the cutting edge of basic education.

Implementation of such a comprehensive and challenging reform agenda calls for initiation of actions of different kinds and on multiple fronts. At the country level a series of specific actions aimed at the continual renewal of basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor in the key areas of programme contents and processes, orientation of teachers and other educational functionaries, promoting partnerships, policy advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation are needed. Actions are also called for towards the creation of a collaborative and supportive context for facilitating inter-country cooperation in reengineering basic education towards poverty eradication through empowerment of the poor. These actions could be the setting up of inter-country technical fora to promote dialogue among key decision makers from the concerned countries, launching of pilot projects, promotion of inter-country exchange of information and experiences, joint research in critical areas, implementation of a cooperative agenda on the use of media and information technology and inter-country cooperative undertakings.

Considering the perception of the countries in the region of the state of their basic education programmes vis-a-vis poverty eradication and the need for their reorientation towards empowerment of the poor, the expectations are that the countries would respond with creative and context-specific action initiatives towards transforming their basic education programmes into effective instruments of human empowerment and national development. It is also expected that the efforts of individual countries to direct the thrusts of their basic education programmes towards empowerment of the poor would elicit strong and sustained support through international initiatives especially by the UN specialized agencies – UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and other international donors and partners – in the form of creation of collaborative context for inter-country cooperative actions and promotion of partnerships. With the declaration of 1997-2006 as the UN Decade for Eradication of Poverty it is hoped that these expectations would be fully realized.

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